A Man Story

E. W. HOWE

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A MAN STORY

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BY

E. W. HOWE

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF A COUNTRY TOWN," "THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCKS," "A MOONLIGHT BOY," ETC.

BOSTON
TICKNOR AND COMPANY
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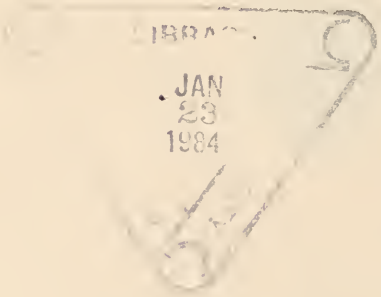

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A MAN STORY.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE STORY CAME TO BE WRITTEN.

At the time when all the incidents were fresh in the minds of those concerned, it was generally said that they would make a story. This impression was particularly marked after the events immediately following the closing chapters, and there was seldom a day that the matter of a story was not mentioned; it was even said that I should attempt it, as I had regained a certain amount of respect among them by reason of the incidents narrated, and although they soon ceased talking about it entirely, I continued to think of the suggestion of a story, which had at first impressed me favorably, and finally set to work, though with many misgivings.

It seems easy to write a story. After reading a book, particularly a good one, the writing of it seems to have been an easy matter. I think I was induced to attempt to tell this story of a man from reading certain books which were written so easily that little work was apparently connected with them, but I now feel, after an actual experience with the task, that no one will be encouraged to write a book by what I have written; I am so certain that the style is stiff, and the characters awkwardly introduced, though I might have done better had I not felt it my duty to narrate the facts almost as they happened, for there is a wide license in fiction which I have not been permitted to employ.

But when I think of it, the writing of fiction is no doubt difficult. There are a thousand expressions that may be put in the mouth of every character; the effort to select the best ones from the mass of material offering, is no doubt a tiresome work. There is not a line in any book — except a book like this, where

the facts are ready at hand — that might not be written in almost numberless ways, and the worry of the authors, in trying to do as well as possible, will distress me in future whenever I see a printed page; I have worried so much over my own work, although I had only my memory to look to. A character that might strike the popular fancy may be curtailed, in the author's anxiety, and a bad one enlarged upon. Every description in a book might be written in a thousand ways; the conversation of the characters might be lengthened or shortened to their improvement. I imagine that there is scarcely a sentence, in short, that does not walk through the sleeping and waking hours of the poor authors, asking for aid, and their distress has affected me so much that I shall not attempt it again; there are rewards in business not to be had in book-writing, and they do not cost so much. I have a dread and guilty feeling when looking at the desk at which this story was written that I never experienced on looking at the

counter behind which I usually spend my time, and I think this must have been a warning. I shall so accept it, at all events. There was a time when I had the greatest hope for myself, but when I was convinced of my error, — the particulars will be found in the eleventh chapter, I think, — the shock of truth was so great that I doubt that I shall ever recover from it.

Even in writing this poor book, I have dreamed at night only of poring over its pages, trying to enlarge here and cut out there, to the end that the cruel things usually said of books might be avoided; indeed, while about the writing I became so frowsy and wretched looking, that many of my friends imagined that I was dissipating at night, and spending in high revel the hours I really devoted to attempts to soften the hard places. I have also heard it intimated that I am of a melancholy turn, and that I spend my idle time in moping about; I have really been employed in trying to fairly represent the man

whose story I have written, but I feel certain that I shall hear soon that my time would have been better employed in my old listless way.

The amateur who attempts a part in a play — and who has not attempted a part in the great representation of life, and failed? — usually has the satisfaction of knowing that the house was not crowded, and that the exact particulars of his disgrace will in time be forgotten in the failure of others, since his actions and his words must be matters of memory with his critics; but the amateur who attempts a book does not get off so well. He never lights his lamp at night that he does not think of some one looking over his book and reading passages aloud to laugh at them. If his is a sensitive soul, — and it is said such long to put themselves in books, — it must often occur to him that the evidences of his folly can never be lost. A play-bill may be destroyed, and with it the name of the bad actor, but no one destroys a book; even the worst

books are kept, and I have of late noticed a tendency among the people to enjoy very bad stories, because of their absurdities, in preference to reading authors who are neither very good nor very bad, but who are only tiresome. The last book that created a sensation in our community had no other recommendation than its absurdity, and I heard a bright man say not long ago that the age was so noted for bad books that he had a mind to write one in mockery, and make it so absurd that the sales would be enormous. The author of the worst book ever written believed in it; no one believed in the great men when they were boys, and the boys of whom a great deal was expected proved a disappointment. Who can tell?

My greatest fear is that it will be said that the man whose story it is was allowed too much space, and that his talking for pages at a time without interruption, was a rude violation of the proprieties. In order to prepare the reader for this — for with my lack of

art I could not very well avoid it — I have given the book a title which will indicate that a man has a good deal to do with it. Had I been free to select, as fiction-writers are, I think I should have made A Woman Story, for it seems to me now that there is little that is interesting in the life of a man; but the time has come when I can no longer delay; I must either burn the manuscript or print it, and since we hope in spite of our fear, with trembling and misgiving I submit the story.

C. B.

CHAPTER II.

THE BENDS.

WHAT is the first thing you can remember? I imagine that every one has asked himself, or herself, the question, and that they have decided upon an incident with which their recollection began.

The first thing I can remember is of my mother crying, late one afternoon, because of a fear she had just expressed that my head was so unusually large that I would certainly die of brain fever, and that she would consequently never have the honor of rearing the smartest baby ever born; but as many other mothers have had the same foolish fear of sons who grew up into dull manhood, my recollection need go no farther back than is necessary for the purpose of this story,—to a certain date when I was twelve years old, and when

I began to realize that our family was afflicted with the Bends.

My father, who was a boomer, with town-lots and bonds for sale, kept a store at Fog Lake, and we lived in rooms over his place of business, in connection with my two grandfathers and my Aunt Florence. The boomer was away from home on the afternoon of the day when I became twelve years old, having gone to a neighboring town to secure a bucket factory, which he had heard was contemplated, and when my mother came into the room where I sat, and cried out in a despairing tone, "The Bends!" I thought she referred to a band of robbers who were sacking the town, or something of that kind; so I went down into the store to see what it all meant.

I found the young man who acted as the Boomer's clerk in a good deal of excitement, because of the boisterous conduct of my paternal grandfather, who had locked himself in his room in the top story of the house, and was carrying on in such a manner that a

crowd of people had collected in front of the building. He had taken liquor up there, and gone on a bender; and when my mother came into the store wringing her hands, and saying that her family was disgraced with "the Bends," and that her boy could never take the place in the world his smartness warranted, because of this calamity, I imagined there had been so many benders within her recollection that she referred to them in a general way as "The Bends," which I afterwards found to be the case.

My mother's father, as handsome an old gentleman as one could wish to see, also lived at our house, but he did not like my other grandfather, and was therefore not disturbed because of his actions. These two hated each other, and I heard the clerk say to a man who came in to offer his assistance in the family's distress that there would have been no benders had there been no quarrel between the old gentlemen. When I was a very little boy, I had somehow formed the habit of call-

ing them Number One and Number Two, which had been followed by all the others, and it appeared that when Number Two could no longer stand the silent impudence of Number One, he went on a bender to relieve himself.

Number Two was as rich as Number One, for both of them were as poor as they could be, but he did not look so well or dress so well. When he had a new suit of clothes out of the store, he soon had it looking wretchedly, and I suppose this was one reason why he usually attended to the stable, and did such other work, while Number One did not do anything to speak of, except to sit in the best room and read books.

I had heard it said that he could cure cancers, and that he knew more than many doctors; but there were no cancers in that country, so we had no other authority for his greatness than the word of his daughter, my mother, who admired him immensely, and never tired of relating what a distinguished man he

had been in his prime; but Number Two doubted all this, in which I think he was aided and abetted by his son, the Boomer.

I did not like Number One very well myself, he was so chilly and respectable; and the first shock of my life was when I remembered that the one who regarded me with the greatest admiration, my mother, was so badly mistaken about her father. He was also responsible for the story, which I heard so often that I disliked it, that I cried so much as a baby that he had made up his mind to ask me, in case I ever grew up, what I was crying about.

Number One also had his bed in the best room, which he folded out of the way during the day, and he was known to look displeased when there was company which interfered with his genteel solitude to an extent that he did not like.

It was understood that my father could manage the Bends, but as he was away, certain men in the town who were supposed to have

influence with him were sent to Number Two's door; but he paid no attention to them, and went on with his carouse. I had perhaps been familiar with his habits of dissipation before, but it seems to me now that they had escaped me up to this time, for the bender seemed so curious to me that when none of them could do anything with Number Two, and had given him up in despair, I finally went up the little stairway leading to his door, and listened.

I could make out in a confused sort of way that Number Two was having a reunion, and although he was certainly alone, he pretended to be surrounded by his old army comrades, with whom he drank frequently, for I could hear the glasses rattling, and Number Two insisting that they fill them up again in memory of old times.

Between his drinks he would relate anecdotes, usually commencing by saying, "Your story, comrade, reminds me of an incident in my own experience;" and when I looked

through the keyhole, I saw that he had his old uniform on, which included a little cap, with a brass letter and number in front. I could also see that he was seated at his wash-stand, in the centre of which stood a bottle surrounded by several tumblers and mugs, and against which leaned a musket. Number Two had been a private, and was honest enough to admit it; but there was a certain Captain Waterbury who attended the reunions, and I have heard him refer to the captain quite familiarly, usually in connection with urging him to take one more.

He frequently referred to a certain Devil who had not been in the war at all, and whom it was desirable to exterminate, and I felt certain that the Devil he referred to was Number One, his enemy. I could hear him telling his comrades, who were represented by the mugs and glasses, that while it was certain that the Devil had not carried arms on the right side, it was not certain that he had not consorted in a cowardly way with the enemy;

indeed, Number Two went so far as to propose a set of resolutions for adoption, denouncing all Rebels and Copperheads, and calling for their blood; but before the final vote I became so frightened that I went downstairs with a view of warning Number One of his danger, though I thought less of him than I did of Number Two. But when I went into the room where he was, Number One seemed so conscious of his own safety that I said nothing at all, and felt rather ashamed that I should have imagined that so distinguished a man was in danger. Although my mother was very much agitated over the events of the evening, and was saying between her sobs that our family could never amount to anything so long as it was cursed with "The Bends," and that while she had the smartest son in the world, he could not do well when the people in the street could see that he came from a family afflicted as ours was, her father was as dignified as ever, and whatever his thoughts might have been, he said nothing.

Though I did not like him, I could not help admitting that he was distinguished-looking, for his heavy hair and whiskers, which were of a respectable iron-gray, made him look like the great men I had seen pictures of, and there was a general dignity about him which I often regretted that Number Two did not possess. Number Two was very bald, and somewhat slouchy in his gait and manner, and there was something sneaking in his style, which came, I think, from his chewing great quantities of plug tobacco, in spite of the fact that my mother and her father, eminently respectable people, did not approve of the habit. Number Two pretended that it was neither disgraceful nor criminal to chew plug tobacco, but, in spite of it, I noticed that he did his chewing down at the stable, and that when he came into the house he carefully wiped his mouth.

When I went upstairs again, which I did on being convinced that Number One was in no danger, I found that the excitement was increasing. There was loud talk of all those

present loading their muskets, and making one more charge on the Rebels, and Copperheads, and Devils, but just at the moment when matters seemed serious, and Number Two was declaring that he would lead the way, and point out the Rebel, the Copperhead, and the Devil, there was a strong step on the stair, and I turned and saw my Uncle Tom ascending; Uncle Tom, the husband of my Aunt Florence, who travelled from the City, a long way off, and only came home at long intervals; but he had arrived unexpectedly, it seemed, and was coming up to join in the reunion, having been a soldier himself. My uncle had great influence with Number Two, and, after nodding pleasantly to me, he rapped loudly on the door.

"Comrade," he said, addressing my grandfather upon the inside, "I am a little late, but I hope you will be glad to see me."

There was some talk upon the inside, as though the veterans were impatient because of being disturbed, even by a favorite, and finally my grandfather hoarsely inquired: —

"Who goes there?"

"Tom Saulsbury, of the Sixty-fourth Regiment; a friend."

I do not think Number Two wanted to be interrupted, and would have preferred not to have admitted any one, but there was a hearty goodness about my uncle that no one could resist, and the door was opened after some hesitation, Number Two appearing behind it, looking somewhat sheepish and red-eyed from the effects of his dissipation.

As Uncle Tom stepped into the room, at the same time heartily greeting Number Two as his comrade in war and his friend in peace, he took me with him, and I believe he did this not so much to accommodate me as to increase his influence over my grandfather, who, my uncle seemed to argue, would be more tractable in the presence of a boy than when only grown persons were present; so I was allowed to remain, although the door was locked behind us.

The room into which we went was a half-

story one next to the roof at the front of the building, and was bare of furniture save a rough bed covered with gray blankets, a wash-stand, and two or three knapsacks. Instead of keeping his things in a trunk, Number Two kept them in knapsacks, which he carefully unpacked and repacked whenever he wanted anything, and as he brought up his water in canteens, he could have marched at a moment's notice had Number One made a retreat necessary. I was not often in the room, and while I looked around curiously at the swords and belts and army pictures on the wall, I remarked that Uncle Tom had entered heartily into the reunion, and soon had Number Two in the best of humor. He drank from all of the glasses, I remember, as though he wanted to exhaust the supply of liquor, and talked soldier talk with great ease and enjoyment, frequently saying that he was sorry he had arrived so near the close of the reunion, as he would have enjoyed all of the exercises. As a matter of fact, the reunion had only com-

menced late that afternoon, and as a rule they lasted two or three days, but I believed Uncle Tom was saying this as a preliminary to breaking it up presently. Number Two was disposed to be noisy and drink heavily, but Uncle Tom reminded him with great delicacy that none of the old boys could "stay" as they used to, and that nothing was thought of it if the old soldiers were not as tough as they were during the war, for time was stiffening their frames, and they must take care of themselves. It thus came about naturally enough that after remaining in the room an hour or so, Uncle Tom commenced to talk about breaking up, and to sing songs that both of them remembered in connection with their regiments separating after the war; and I was not surprised when my uncle finally said good-night to Number Two, blew out the light, and retired, taking me with him. It seemed a rather bold proceeding even for a bold man like my uncle, but I did not believe the lamp would be lighted again that night.

. . . . . .

At three o'clock the next morning we heard the town omnibus rattle up to our door, a train having arrived about that time, and after a great noise on the part of the driver in backing the vehicle up to the steps, Number Two got out, and softly ascended to his room, as though he had been away and had just returned. This was his custom on recovering from the Bends, and we knew that the reunion was over.

CHAPTER III.

MR. TOM.

When we went downstairs my uncle was greeted in his own room by Mr. Tom, who had been waiting for him, and he said that he had drunk so much of the liquor to keep it from freezing, that he felt a little like making a night of it; but he did not, because he wanted to remain up rather late.

Uncle Tom was very fond of his wife, but he was always saying that he would gladly be rid of her, and he ashamed of himself for it, although no one ever believed that he meant it. No one could see of Mr. Tom; certainly no one ever had much of her, and she had been in our house most of her life.

"When I am on the road," he said, after exercising to his wife that her big brother's name had returned, and that she should make

the most of the silly fellow, "I long for you as much as a boy longs for recess, for I am not a wise man, and cannot console my loneliness by thinking of the blessed times when I see you. I don't get any better, either. I suppose the only way out of it is to quit the road, and come home and tire of you."

Mrs. Tom was so busy rejoicing because of her merry husband's arrival that she paid little attention to this statement, which seemed rather alarming to me, but perhaps she had heard it before, and knew that he was not serious.

"But now that I am with you," he continued, "I haven't a care in the world. I was thinking last week that there was no use living, and keeping up the struggle, but I have nothing to wish for, now that I am at home. I believe you are better-looking than when I saw you last. I don't imagine that you are known in this country as a beauty, but I'm in love, and I think you are the prettiest woman I ever saw."

I had never thought Mrs. Tom particularly

good-looking, but now that the subject was brought to my mind, I thought she certainly looked better than when I had last looked at her critically; she had a way of growing in your favor the longer you knew her, and as I had known her a long time, I esteemed her very highly.

"When I drove up just now I thought this old house the handsomest I ever saw, because you were under its roof. I am becoming more ridiculously in love with Lady Pleaseme every day, and sometimes I laugh at my own folly. But you won't think of all this nonsense, and remind me of it after I have tired of you, will you? That's the way old Barnaby's wife does."

Uncle Tom travelled for Barnaby & Co., from the City, and the head of the house did not get along pleasantly with his wife; we had heard so much of old Barnaby and his meanness with his wife that we felt quite well acquainted with him.

Mrs. Tom did not reply to his question or intimate how she would act after he had tired

of her, but after returning from an adjoining room with his slippers, she patted his strong frame with girlish glee, and said: —

"You won't, will you?"

Uncle Tom gravely shook his head, and I believed this to be a declaration that he would never forget her.

"I *say* I won't," he said, as he leisurely made preparations to put on the slippers, "and I mean it, now; but you know how the men are. Old Barnaby thought he wouldn't, but he did."

Mrs. Tom had found his dressing-gown by this time, and gave it to him, saying at the same time, "You will, won't you?"

This time Uncle Tom nodded his head and laughed, and I knew he was declaring that he would always love her. These were favorite questions with Mrs. Tom, and when they were together Uncle Tom had his head going a good deal, either shaking it to declare that he would never forget his wife, or nodding it as a means of indicating that he would always love her. Occasionally he shook his head

when he intended to nod it, he kept his head nodding so much in answer to Mrs. Tom's questions, and at these times there was apparently great excitement, but they thoroughly understood each other, and never had any real trouble.

"There never was a man as certain of anything as I am that I will always love you," he said, opening his travelling-bag to look for something, which turned out to be a present for Mrs. Tom; "but you know old Barnaby thought he would always love his wife, and he hates her now. I wonder if he is not awfully ashamed when he thinks how he has changed; I know I'll be. What a silly woman you are to have confidence in me; you don't know what a fickle, bad lot the men are. It may be the making of your husband, though, this faith you have in him. I know a man on the road who says his wife believes in him, and he has a foolish ambition to deserve her confidence. He goes to church on Sunday when away from home,

because he thinks it will please his wife, although he can quote from all the infidel books. He does whatever his wife believes he will do, and says it is a pleasure to feel that he is worthy of her great trust in him."

I thought it possible that Uncle Tom referred to himself; I knew that he had a good deal of faith in religion, because his wife wanted him to. Once when he was at home, the pastor in charge of the Fog Lake church had dinner at our house, and when it occurred to Uncle Tom that perhaps his wife would be humiliated to have the good man see that her husband was not religious, he startled them all by asking a very good blessing. I believe that had Mrs. Tom been a Spiritualist, her husband would have secretly made raps, and listened very gravely; anything his wife believed in was good enough for him.

Mrs. Tom had examined the present by this time, and while it pleased her she said she feared he could not afford such extravagance,

for his coming home was all the present she wanted; besides, he was saving his money to go into business for himself, and needed it all. Uncle Tom was always bringing home money, his savings from his salary, which he gave his wife to "keep," as he feared he would waste it; he had a lot this time, which he produced to be put away with the other.

"I am glad to inform you," he said, "that during this trip I have recovered from one of my follies; it was a great struggle, but I conquered it. I suppose I am about the stoutest man in Fog Lake, but there was a time when your worrying over my health pleased me. Had I a headache, you asked; I investigated, and so reluctantly answered No that you thought I was really suffering greatly, and in my goodness was keeping it from you. I am so much in love with you that I was pleased because of your worry; no one else worries about me, and I gave myself up to it — I am ashamed of it, but I did. Well, during this last trip it occurred to me, and

I thought it all over — I can never think sensibly of anything when I am with you — and I realized how selfish I was, for you are not very strong yourself. A fragile woman like you worrying over the health of a stout fellow like me! I was as ashamed of that as I will be when I tire of you. So we'll have no more worry over my health; I have recovered from that folly, though I am as bad as ever in all the others. And I intend to bring you presents; do you hear? I intend to bring you presents."

He said this with mock fierceness, which caused Mrs. Tom and me to laugh.

"But I'll tell you what you may do," he continued; "you may regard me as a great man kept down by envy. I'm not kept down by anything, except by my own worthlessness; but you may think I am, and I'll enjoy it. Old Barnaby's wife thought he was a great man, and that he would in time startle the world; but while he enjoyed it once, he must feel ashamed when he realizes that he is now

keeping a store. While I am in love I want to enjoy all there is in it."

I left him soon after, although I always disliked to go to bed when he was at home, and long after I was in my room I could hear him gayly talking to his wife, and I had no doubt he frequently nodded his head, and as frequently shook it, to declare that he would always love his wife, and that he would never forget her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOOMER.

When Uncle Tom came home after one of his long trips, he had the habit of sleeping late, and as everything around the house was regulated to suit his convenience, we did not breakfast the following morning until nine o'clock. When Number Two appeared, I noticed that he came in from the stable, where he had been at work, although his enemy had been sitting in his room for two hours, looking over a number of newspapers.

I was glad to notice, also, that Uncle Tom greeted Number Two as though they had not met before within a month, when my uncle was last at home. I thought it was very kind in him; and my father, who had also returned during the night, looked admiringly at my uncle, as though he thought more

than ever of him, because of his thoughtfulness, as I did.

We all admired Uncle Tom, including Number One, who conversed with him in beautiful language during the progress of breakfast; but I thought he was impatient when Uncle Tom turned to Number Two, and spoke of various things in which he was interested. Being naturally a modest man, and still suffering from the effects of his carouse the night before, grandfather said little in reply; but once he broke out in a place where the remark was not at all appropriate, and said that people should be charitable with the faults of others, as every one kept his skeleton, which I thought was a delicate reference to "The Bends," and perhaps an intimation that he knew something on Number One.

Of course Mrs. Tom, who had been a poor relation in the family before her marriage, admired Mr. Saulsbury more than any of us, and she had reason to, for there never was a more devoted husband. My uncle was

greatly admired in the town, but he did not seem to care particularly for any one except his wife, and as Mrs. Tom had been somewhat neglected before her marriage, she keenly appreciated the distinction of being made much of by her distinguished husband.

Mrs. Tom came to our house before I can remember, in company with a brother who was always looking for something to do, and her devotion to him was one of the traditions of the family. Being a sleepy, worthless fellow, the brother had no friends, and finally disappeared, after his sister had spent years of her life in getting him up in the morning to go away to the work which she always found for him, and which he neglected in spite of her. Her mother, who was the Boomer's sister, had married a man who must have been much like his son, and I imagined that the mother worried about the father's shiftlessness much as the daughter worried about the son's, for while I heard many kind words for Mrs. Tom's mother, I heard little to the credit of

her father, though both were entitled to the charity which is usually given to people that are dead.

Mrs. Tom was so delighted to have her husband at home that it was a pleasant sight to look at her as she tried to think of everything that would please him, and while we were all fond of him, none of us went to the kitchen as often as she did to see that his breakfast was satisfactory. Uncle Tom appeared to enjoy this as much as she did, for although he did not like to make trouble, he knew that she enjoyed it, and said that after a month of looking after his customers, it was mighty good to have somebody look after him; so he gave himself up to enjoyment, and snapped his fingers at old Barnaby.

Old Barnaby was his employer, and a hard employer he was, too, for he kept Uncle Tom employed to such an extent that he could not come home more than once in four or five weeks. Sometimes he was away six and seven weeks, much as he had to call him home, for

his wife was the dearest woman in the world, and very fond of him, and there was always great rejoicing in our family when Uncle Tom sat his two handbags down on the parlor floor, and invited us all to come in and congratulate him on his good fortune in getting home after a hard trip.

Uncle Tom was also popular in the town, and his coming home was always an event, for while Fog Lake was visited by salesmen from a town within sixty or seventy miles, my uncle was the only travelling man who came there from the City, where few of us had ever been, and his affairs were so important that he did not offer to trade with the Fog Lake merchants. The Boomer occasionally made reference to his facilities for procuring goods at first hands, by reason of family connections, but I never knew of his buying anything of the house represented by Uncle Tom; I think this was another fiction of the Boom he was always talking about.

My father was busy looking over the news-

papers, occasionally making notes of what he read, so that he made little progress with his breakfast. Whenever he found an account of a fire in a newspaper, he at once wrote and invited the man to rebuild in Fog Lake, at the same time offering a lot for the purpose, and as many merchants and manufacturers thus written to had politely replied acknowledging his kindness, and saying they would "think of it," the Boomer believed he was sowing seed in very good ground, and worked early and late. Indeed, he thought his plan of watching the newspapers for accounts of fires was a particularly good one, and we were requested to keep it very quiet, as my father feared that the Boomers in other towns would adopt the same course. He was always finding startling news in the papers, and we were not surprised when he read the following aloud, at the same time showing the greatest excitement:—

"It is said that the Sunset route will build a thousand miles of new road during the present year."

Although he was not more than half through with his breakfast, and had only returned from a booming expedition a few hours before, he got up from the table at once, made a hurried pass at my mother's lips, and went out, and within ten minutes was on his way to the next county to talk to the people about the feasibility of inducing the Sunset route to build that way, although I heard Uncle Tom say that there was no more possibility of his securing it than there was hope of securing the oyster packing-house my father had been talking of some weeks before. Uncle Tom did not have much faith in the Boomer's scheme to transplant codfish in the lake near the town, either, and was somewhat sceptical concerning a great many things which were promptly accepted where we lived.

The Boomer was naturally a good deal interested in the improvement of Fog Lake, for he owned nearly all the farms adjoining it, and most of the lots in the town, and it was plain to be seen that when certain of his plans

were perfected, he would become a very rich man by the advance in his property. Up to that time he had not realized much from the boom; indeed, I had only heard of his making one cash transaction, but he had the greatest hope. The one transaction in which he received money was with a certain Mr. Footit, who had been induced to pay cash for a lot of the Boomer's bonds; but as Mrs. Footit was constantly demanding the return of the money, in a very harsh and loud voice, adding, at the same time, that she did not propose to be robbed, he found little comfort even in that.

While I was standing at the window with Uncle Tom, thinking of Footit, I saw his son Bud, a freckle-faced boy of about my own age, coming along the street. He was trying to coax a stray dog to follow him, but, as the dog steadily refused to become a member of his family, Bud finally kicked the animal viciously, and came on into the house in answer to my hail, for I wanted to see him.

Mrs. Footit had a habit of hiring a negro boy who lived on her farm, the son of a renter, to whip Bud when he would not behave himself, and this having come to the knowledge of Uncle Tom, he had undertaken to teach Bud the art of self-defence, in the hope that he would, in time, be able to vanquish the black boy. So we three retired to the stable at once to practise another lesson. Tying cotton batting around our hands with handkerchiefs, Uncle Tom soon had us banging away at each other's heads, and parrying, and jumping out of the way, and during the pauses, when he called "time," he gave us new ideas, which we were expected to practise during the next round.

Bud was the most vicious boy I ever knew, and as he hit me as hard as he could, I was compelled to learn to box, too, or be pounded up every day Uncle Tom was at home. Of course I wanted to see Bud whip the negro, but it seemed to me that in return for my kindness in practising with him, he should

have shown some delicacy in striking me. But he did not; so I was compelled to strike back, and keep out of his way.

Uncle Tom finally left us, and the fight at times became so furious that we grabbed each other, and tripped, and fell, when we rested awhile, and then went at it again. Bud was always trying to "do" me, — I don't know where he learned that word, but I never liked it, — and had he succeeded, I think I should have hoped for the success of the negro when the fight came off.

He expressed a willingness to quit after awhile, but I was in bad humor, and walked back to the house alone, thinking that when I finally came home with blood and bruises all over me, that I could only say, in explanation to the folks, that they ought to see Bud Footit, for I felt certain that a fight between us was inevitable.

I was generally regarded as about the most promising boy in that country; I had attended school so long that I was the head scholar,

and crowded the house at the exhibitions, and as Bud was a boy of no consequence, I felt that he did not appreciate my unselfishness in assisting him to learn how to square an account with a negro enemy. My given name was Chance (which I regarded as a delicate admission that I was the first chance the family had ever had for distinction), therefore his habit of trying to hit in the mouth, and his attempts to blacken eyes, were exceedingly exasperating to a boy who had new clothes out of his father's store whenever he wanted them, and who wore shoes in summer, and who had nothing whatever to do except to prepare himself for the life of a gentleman; and as I was as good a boxer as he was, and as stout, I made up my mind to show my admirers in the town that while I could tell how many quarts of water the deepest cistern would hold, and how many cubic yards there were in the pyramids, I could also give the blacksmith lessons in hard hitting. I had been applauded by the people because of my fiery

declamations at the school exhibitions (all the business men of the town being present, who were thinking they would bid high for my services when I was ready to engage in business), and I had now made up my mind that when Bud Footit came to town, his father leading him, because he could not see out of his puffed eyes, there would be a new sort of applause for the Bennington boy. It was not generally known in the town that I was a boxer, but the fact would soon come out, and as I walked through the store I imagined I could already see Bud's mother buying arnica with which to bathe her mean son's bruises.

CHAPTER V.

WAS HE IN LOVE?

Uncle Tom was great to lounge around while at home, and spent most of his time in his room, where his wife constantly hovered around him. They were good enough to often invite me to visit them, and on this particular morning, when Uncle Tom went off into a sleep, I assisted Mrs. Tom in fanning him, for it was a hot day. When there was an unusual noise on the outside, she was fearful that it might waken the sleeper; but he enjoyed being at home so much that nothing disturbed him. When he finally awoke of his own accord, Mrs. Tom lifted his head into her lap, as she sat beside him on the bed, and fondled him like a baby.

"I am so glad to have you at home again," she said, "that you are not to get up at all, and I will bring your dinner up here."

Uncle Tom folded his hands back of his head, and, stretching out comfortably, said that would be nice, but he didn't believe he would have his dinner just then, for he was enjoying himself better as he was.

"You don't care if I do impose on you, do you?" he said, as she was smoothing his hair, and trying to remember what a mole meant she found on his forehead.

Mrs. Tom said she enjoyed being imposed upon, if he called anything he ever did imposing on her, at the same time asking me to please lower the blind a little to keep the sun off his precious head.

"So many people impose on me," Uncle Tom continued, "that when my turn comes to be petted, I like it. I feel like a headstrong boy who runs away, and has come back tired and footsore to his home, where they are all kind and thoughtful, instead of rough and selfish. You have no idea how unreasonable some of my customers are; they imagine that if they find a great deal of unreasonable fault, I will

be more careful to protect their interests; but I hope your attention to me is not prompted by selfishness; I don't deserve such a blessing, but I believe you are really fond of me, and as I am a foolish sort of a fellow, it is a great comfort to associate with some one who believes in me; there are so few who do. Old Barnaby, who does not believe in the nonsense that pleases me, would rave if he should see me now, enjoying myself, for he is a very cross man, and is never satisfied except when his men are uncomfortable from being snubbed by customers. I'd hate to have that man's disposition. You are sure you wouldn't mind going down after my dinner?"

Mrs. Tom was quite certain that she shouldn't mind it, and Uncle Tom requested her to go into the store while she was downstairs, and get him a clay pipe and a package of tobacco, for after his dinner he might want to still further test her good-nature by filling the room with smoke.

So Mrs. Tom propped his head up with a

pillow, and said good-by to him, which he responded to by waving his hand, and went to prepare the dinner.

When she was out of the room, Uncle Tom wanted to know if I didn't think she was a good woman. I replied that I thought she was about the best woman in the world, which seemed to please him; apparently he did not notice that I had said "about the best woman in the world," — the exception being my mother, who had such a high opinion of me that I could not say less.

"You don't mind my making love to her in your presence, do you?" he said again.

I assured him that I did not, and rather enjoyed it myself, since it pleased her so much, never once thinking that he might be referring to my habit of staying with them so much. Indeed, I do not know that it was on his mind at all, for he never seemed to care for my being about, and I have always hoped that he accepted me as one of his admirers, and was glad to see me at all times, though when I

remained with them too long, he had a way of disposing of me by suggesting with the greatest earnestness that a bed be made up for me on the floor.

"I'm glad you don't mind it," he said, "for it is a great comfort for me to make love to your aunt, and the best of it is, she likes it as well as I do."

I thought he was going off to sleep again, for he was silent quite a long time, but finally he said: "After you become a man, and are married, your acquaintance with Mrs. Tom will prove very unfortunate; your wife will seem dreadfully commonplace after having known Mrs. Tom. I think I hear her coming."

It was Mrs. Tom (who was really my cousin, though I had formed the habit of calling her my aunt), and she was followed by Number Two, who carried the tray on which the dinner was laid, and though he offered to retire at once, Uncle Tom called to him to come in and visit him. I knew Number Two was hoping for an invitation to come

in, and that he enjoyed being there as much as I did, so he remained, and assisted in placing the dinner on a table we had drawn up by the bed. I am certain that Mrs. Tom invited him to come up, and that he carried the tray as an act of politeness, for she was always thoughtful of him, and his friend.

Uncle Tom was quite merry as he ate his dinner, at the idea of three of us waiting on him, and in a bantering way ordered us to put sugar in the tea, and stir it, and cut the toast into pieces. Once Number Two started to go out, and when Uncle Tom protested, he said he would be glad to remain, but he feared he might stay too long, and wear out his welcome, whereupon Uncle Tom put him at his ease by saying that he wanted him to remain until it was cooler, when we would all go out together.

"I am very fond of your granddaughter, Mr. Bennington," Uncle Tom said to grandfather, who I thought barely remembered his name, he had been called Number Two so long. "I

shall feel awfully ashamed of myself when I realize that I am becoming tired of her. Of course I do not believe that I shall ever tire of her, but old Barnaby did, and you know most husbands do."

I did not know what Number Two's experience had been, for he had been a widower since I had known him, but he did not offer to give us his personal history, further than to say that when you caught a man at a mean thing you should remember that you yourself were liable to be caught the same way some time, and feel the need of charity, which was the most commendable of all the virtues.

We all agreed that there was a good deal in Number Two's suggestion, and this pleased him so much that I thought of his triumph over Number One, who was certainly sitting down in his room regretting that he had not been invited upstairs. Uncle Tom added that if the people would have charity for his faults, he would take pleasure in having char-

ity for theirs, and as this was exactly Number Two's idea, he was quite good-humored. Besides this, Uncle Tom was addressing his conversation mainly to him, and this was a distinction not to be forgotten.

"I believe I would be willing to take an oath that I shall never tire of your granddaughter, and that I will love her more every time I see her," Uncle Tom continued, "but it occurred to me just now, when you were speaking of charity, that if I should realize that I was becoming weary of her presence, after loving her as I do now, and always have, that I should feel like a very wicked man, and feel the need of the virtue you speak so highly of. I am always making love to Mrs. Tom, but many things come into my mind that I do not utter, for the memory of them would make me ashamed should I ever tire of her. I often feel like saying that I intend to devote my life to her, but old Barnaby said that to his wife, and he hates her now; he is really devoting his life to making it

disagreeable for her. I find it impossible to keep old Barnaby out of my mind, somehow, he acts so much like a man; and while I hope to do differently, I cannot help remembering that the world is full of men who have failed after making the best of promises. You don't mind what I have said, do you, Mrs. Tom?"

"No, I don't think I do," his wife replied; "but I am sorry you ever thought it possible you would tire of me."

"Well, I couldn't very well help it with the example of old Barnaby always before me. I don't believe I ever shall tire of you, but when I see a very old man, I can't help thinking of the habit men have of becoming old, and that I am on the same road. I'd give a good deal to know whether old Barnaby was ever as fond of his wife as I am of you. Maybe he was, though, and that is one reason why he is ashamed to go into her presence now; he fears she will remember some of the sweet things he once said to her, and

quote them. Old Barnaby is not a gushy man, and when I think of it, I have no doubt that he was as much in earnest in making love to his wife as I am in making love to you, so it must be that in this respect the to-morrow of men's lives is beyond their control. Old Barnaby has his faults, and I do not attempt to excuse them, but from what I know of him I do not imagine that he was insincere when he declared to Mrs. Barnaby that he loved her. Were it not for the experience of old Barnaby, I should take pride in dedicating my poor life to Mrs. Tom, and probably shed a few tears because of my earnestness, for that is the way I feel; but with the experience of my employer before me, I am afraid to do it; I am afraid that I may turn out another Barnaby, for it is not what a man is anxious or willing to do that is counted to his credit, but what he actually accomplishes."

Grandfather said he believed he should like to know old Barnaby, as he felt certain that he would have charity for the faults of others.

Uncle Tom was certain he would have, whereupon grandfather said *that* was the mark of a man.

Bud Footit came slouching into the room at this time, looking for a fight, I thought; but as Uncle Tom did not encourage him, he sat down to think of new ways to hit me. It occurred to me as I looked at him that he deserved all the whippings he received at home; and that he in particular deserved the one I intended to give him, for I had resolved that since he did not appreciate a friend, I would teach him to respect an enemy.

"The people I meet travelling on the road," Uncle Tom continued, after discussing old Barnaby's charity, and without noticing Bud, which pleased me, "do not venerate and respect me as you do here, and it is possible that when a man has an attentive audience, he talks too freely and too long, but you will pardon me if I say I wonder I am not ashamed to be in love, with all my experience of men. There is some excuse for a young fellow being in

love who imagines that his intended wife is an angel; but I know that Mrs. Tom is a woman, and yet I can't help loving her madly and foolishly. They say that women make more of love than men, and that it is more important to them; but no girl was ever more ridiculously fond of her first sweetheart than I am of my wife, and I have been married two years. A man with the worldly experience that I have had ought to know better than to make much of love, for the reason that old Barnaby once worshipped his wife, and now despises her. I have heard it said that no man ever thoroughly hates a woman unless he has once loved her, and one really should not make much of anything so unstable as that. I met an old gentleman on the cars one day who had been married six times, and he confessed to me that he had been in love just the same way every time; that on five different occasions that which he had considered the love of his life had been entirely forgotten; on five different occasions he had felt that as his love

was dead, he must die too; but nature applied a healing balm to his lacerated heart, and he speedily forgot the old love in a new one. No one is to blame that this is the case, and it is a wise provision that we can off with the old love and on with the new so easily, for otherwise the world would be filled with mourning; but it is the case, therefore I say it is ridiculous for an intelligent person to think as much of another as I do of Mrs. Tom. The natural order of things is right, and I am to blame for a lack of wisdom in making more of love than of anything else in the world. It is a dangerous habit. Being in love will give you brain disease, for the worry of it is worse than overwork. I neglect my business every day to think about my love affair; but it happens to be agreeable to me now. I have known men who carried charms in their pockets, and who said that they were thus cured of serious disorders; the charm I carry cures me of everything, and I believe in it, though I laugh at the men who carry butter-

nuts for rheumatism, as I am certain the world laughs at me.

"You perhaps never knew any one of apparent good sense who really knew as little as I do. When I have arranged to see Mrs. Tom on a Thursday, I fear that the order of things will be changed, and that Thursday will never come again. I know better, but I do not do any better than the silliest man alive. When I think of my long absences from Mrs. Tom, and permit myself to think of how sincerely I long to see her, I am as bad as a home-sick girl, except that I do not cry; I might cry did I not have the faculty of realizing how silly I am, and then I laugh; but it is a dreadfully weary laugh; there is no mirth in it, and I am as lonesome as ever. And the worst of it is the habit is growing on me; but I know a remedy, — if I can't do any better, I will come home, and stay long enough to get tired of her."

He was at once invited to declare that he would always love his wife, and that he would

never forget her, which he did by nodding and shaking his head; and then he told about a man he had once known who had a pretty daughter. She engaged herself to a man the father did not like, and the father declared he would never consent to the marriage; but after a time he yielded, being fond of his child. But by this time the daughter had formed a new attachment, which she was certain was the one of her life, and again the father was asked for his blessing. He refused to give it. He had consented to the first one, but he announced that he would hold out forever against the second young man. He was worried a long time, and held out faithfully several months, but at last he gave in, only to discover that his daughter had made a mistake; she did not love either of the young men, she said. Then she fell in love with a third young man, and was sure she was in earnest this time, and the father consented to him, after the usual struggle; then he was asked to consent to a fourth, and a fifth, and

finally died of sorrow while holding out against a sixth.

"The great hope of my life," Uncle Tom continued, returning to his own affair, "is that I may be able to conduct myself in such a manner that after Mrs. Tom quits speaking to me, she can think of nothing serious to my discredit further than that I am tiresome, and that she is tired of me; I want to be so fair with her that she cannot hate me, as Mrs. B. does old Barnaby; who deserves it, no doubt, for it is said that he quarrels. I intend to improve on old Barnaby in another respect: When I discover that Mrs. Tom is tiring of me, I intend to disappear, and spend the remainder of my life in thinking how agreeable she was before she tired of me; I would prefer the memory of Mrs. Tom as she is now to the presence and love of any other woman. That is, I think so now; I suppose I would fall in love again in a month, but in such an event I am certain that I should feel ashamed of myself. By the way, when we go

out driving, suppose we go over to Mrs. Footit's."

When he made this proposition, his wife usually said, "Tom, you only want to go there to laugh at them;" and Uncle Tom usually replied, "No, I want to see them; they are friends of mine, since they are friends of yours, and I want to do my duty by calling there," but as Bud was present, the proposition was agreed to. So it was arranged that during the drive we should call on Mrs. Footit, who lived four miles in the country; and soon after we started, Uncle Tom and Number Two on the front seat, and Bud and Mrs. Tom and I on the back one.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE OF OUR NEIGHBORS.

Mrs. Footit was only an old acquaintance of my father's, although Number One always insisted on referring to her as a relative, for he was so thoroughly impressed with the idea that his daughter had married into a bad family that he never read accounts of hangings out loud, fearful that he might give offence.

The Boomer was no doubt responsible for this absurd idea, for in his disgust for the distinguished relatives Number One and his daughter were always talking about, he sometimes pretended to have heard that a relative of his own had been hanged, or sent to jail. Number Two entered heartily into the Boomer's only pleasantry, and I have heard them carry on quite ridiculously concerning

their distressingly worthless kin. This was intended as a thrust at relative-worshippers in general, but Number One would not so understand it, and accepted everything that was said in this vein with so much earnestness that the joke was finally given up.

I was allowed to go to Mrs. Footit's as often as I pleased, but I seldom took advantage of the opportunity, except in company with Uncle Tom, who never came home without calling upon her, for I think she amused him. Mrs.. Footit was a tall woman with a great deal of bone, which seemed to stick out in every direction, for I remember that whenever she kissed me, I experienced the sensation of being struck in the face by a man who smoked, for her chin-bone always reached me before her lips did. She kissed me on the visit in question, as a tribute to Uncle Tom, I think, for she was as fond of him as the rest of us were, and I afterwards tasted a piece of tobacco on my lips, which gave me the impression that Mrs. Footit also chewed.

I had always known of her smoking, and I had privately accused her of chewing, and perhaps drinking and swearing, for she was disagreeable to me, and I was willing to think almost anything of her.

The place where they lived was known as "Mrs. Footit's," her husband being of so little importance that no one ever thought of him, except to wonder that he did not quietly disappear sometime, for he was a very good man, and did not smoke, nor chew, nor swear; on the contrary, he was very abstemious and industrious, and although he had a good farm, and money to spare, strangers thought of Mrs. Footit as a widow until they met a quiet little man, and learned that he was Mr. Footit.

Uncle Tom made a great deal of Footit, as he did of all those who were neglected, but before Footit had done smiling on the evening in question because of Uncle Tom's kindness, there was trouble over the circumstance that his son Bud had refused to speak to Uncle Tom.

"I'll blow the horn if you don't," his mother said, in a voice which sounded like a man's; but Bud was stubborn, and did not move. It seemed that his mother had told him to approach Uncle Tom, and say, "I am very glad to see you, Uncle Thomas," which Bud refused to do. Mrs. Footit did not know that Bud had been to town that day expressly to see Uncle Tom, or that he was at our house a good deal when Uncle Tom was at home, or that he came over with us in the carriage, so she insisted on his being polite, "for once in his life," she expressed it, with a snort.

But there was something in the command that the boy did not like, so he stubbornly hung his head and refused to move.

"I'm too big to whip you myself," Mrs. Footit said, as she crushed a piece of natural leaf tobacco in the palm of her hand, and filled a clay pipe, "but you know I'll get somebody of your size that will do it; your father lets you go on like a heathen, but I'll have it out with you, even if there is company."

Footit acted as though he wanted to protest, but I felt certain that he was afraid to, and that he only escaped whippings himself because he was always amiable; and although the others felt awkward, Mrs. Footit was very determined, and when Bud would not say, "How do you do, Uncle Thomas; I am very glad to see you," she went out to the porch, and blew a tremendous blast on a tin horn. We all understood it, and silently waited until we heard some one dash up the steps and into the house; a stout negro boy of Bud's age, whose father lived on the farm, and who was regularly hired to whip Bud when he would not behave, being summoned by a blast on the tin horn, and receiving ten cents for his trouble.

The negro knew what was expected of him, and without paying any attention to the company, he walked up to Bud and attempted to slap his cheek. Bud warded off the blow with his left, and hit the negro a tremendous blow in the chest with his right, which staggered

him, and I felt that the fight so long expected was now in progress, for Bud was thoroughly alive, and held his hands in a manner which must have satisfied his trainer. Mrs. Tom had never countenanced the boxing lessons, but her husband was so much amused, and it was all so ridiculous, that to keep from laughing she went into another room. Uncle Tom pretended to be silently regretting that it was necessary to punish a boy in this manner, however bad he was, though he narrowly watched his pupil, and both the parents were amazed to see how their son was acting. It was an amazing sight, I think, for Bud was hopping about the negro like a professional, and just as I was on the point of suggesting that he give him the undercut (having forgotten my own grievance in the excitement), he thought of it himself, and staggered the negro half across the room with a blow on the chin. Mrs. Footit offered to interfere at this point, and help the negro, but Uncle Tom good-naturedly held her back, and said the

white boy ought to have a show. The negro soon recovered, and blindly dashed at his antagonist, but Bud jumped out of the way, and hit him again as he passed, precisely as Uncle Tom had suggested, and then began slugging him so hard that the negro soon ran out of the room, crying. Bud sat down as though nothing had happened, but Mrs. Footit put on her bonnet and went out, and when she came back she said she had sent the boy's father off, as she would not have such a worthless renter on the place.

Before the trouble was fairly under way, it had occurred to me that in case Bud was a winner I should propose to Mrs. Footit to chastise him at proper intervals myself, though I would scorn to take the ten cents for each whipping that had been formerly paid the negro; but Bud had conducted himself with such surprising ability during the fight, that I concluded to postpone my own engagement with him until I was crowded.

Mrs. Footit soon recovered herself, and in-

quired after Uncle Tom's health and prospects quite pleasantly, after making an apology for the fight. She put the blame on Footit, although Footit had had nothing to do with it, and also stated that although in other families it was the habit of fathers to correct their children, she found it necessary to hire the neighbors when Bud became unmanageable, as was often the case, as I knew; I think I had never been at their house that the negro boy had not been called in to earn a dime.

The fight reminded Mrs. Footit of her other troubles, and as she sat smoking her pipe, and blowing rings into the air, she grumbled and growled at a furious rate, which I thought greatly delighted Uncle Tom, although he seemed quietly pleased over the success of his pupil. I think that Mrs. Tom was also amused, in spite of her former protests against the boxing lessons, for I caught her smiling several times when there was nothing funny in the conversation.

Footit was in a stupefied but pleasant frame

of mind, I thought, and did not seem to hear the grumbling of his wife, which should have interested him immensely, for he was concerned. It had always been disagreeable to me, but Uncle Tom seemed to enjoy it, and did everything he could to keep her going. At some time in her life Mrs. Footit had been engaged to be married to a young man who clerked in a store, — she said she had, but I never believed it, — and she talked a great deal of her folly in giving up this chance for social promotion to oblige Footit. It seemed very funny to Uncle Tom that Mrs. Footit should regard this circumstance as of such great importance, but Footit seemed to share in the opinion that the opportunity was one of a lifetime, for he roused up presently, and said to Uncle Tom and me softly that he had seen the clerk, and that he was really a great chance; though he hoped no one would say that he had ever failed in trying to make Mrs. Footit a good husband. His wife heard the remark, for she had sharp ears, and said:

"Oh, you've done the best you could, Footit; nobody cares to deny that; but nobody will deny that the best you can do amounts to little enough."

This shut up Footit for the night, and he spent the remainder of the evening in trying to hide Bud, who had settled down on the floor beside him. Footit occasionally stroked the boy's head, as a mother might do after her child had been beaten by a hard father, for he seemed to fear that Mrs. Footit would put on the gloves with him herself before the evening was over, and in that event his boxing lessons would do him no good; indeed, Mrs. Footit was so big and bony that I feared that in case Uncle Tom offended her in any way, she would whip Bud's teacher. During the evening the Boomer's bond transaction with Footit occurred to her, and the angry reference she made to it made me feel that my father should take boxing lessons without any unnecessary delay.

Footit was immensely pleased when Uncle

Tom gave the boy a piece of money, and although Mrs. Footit saw it, and said he would probably swallow it, and choke himself, the good-natured way in which Uncle Tom laughed at the idea convinced me that the present was a dollar, and that Bud could not swallow it.

There was a cradle in the room, in which a baby girl was sleeping, and when the child became restless, Mrs. Footit told Bud to rock it. He sullenly consented, but I noticed that he moved the cradle in a certain jerky way intended to disturb the child, for it soon began crying, and the father took it in his arms, and walked softly up and down the room to comfort it. Mrs. Footit paid no attention at all, as she was still talking of Hickey, the clerk, and Bud went back to his corner, where he looked malicious so pleasantly that I thought that he had discovered the jerky way of rocking the cradle some time before.

Mrs. Tom was as indignant as she could be with her husband because of the manner in

which he led Mrs. Footit up to the clerk, for he sympathized with her grief, and said the clerk must suffer, too, which brought out the revelation (which he had heard several times before) that the clerk was married, and that Mrs. Footit never went to town, or met a stranger, that she did not hear what a devoted husband the clerk was, and how he added a new addition to his house every year; but if Mrs. Tom was distressed on Footit's account, as was probable, her sympathy was misplaced, for that worthy gentleman apparently enjoyed hearing that the jewel now in his possession was once coveted by the greatest in the land, and he seemed quite affected when Mrs. Footit wept over the recollection of her misfortunes in a loud way, which made me think it was funny. Indeed, I could not help smiling in a silly sort of way at Footit, who no doubt thought my joy related to the present of a dollar to Bud, but he looked very grave, as though there were some griefs in life which no amount of money could put out of mind.

He lost all interest in his wife's conversation as soon as she ceased talking of Hickey, and discussed styles with Mrs. Tom, for he sat down near my grandfather and modestly talked to him, at the same time keeping his arms moving to quiet the baby. Mrs. Tom was very neat in matters of dress, but Mrs. Footit had a wretched figure, though it was not so bad as her style of dressing, and her remarks on the subject were ludicrous, but she remembered that Hickey had once said that pink became her. This reference to the clerk caused Footit to come over to her side again, that he might learn all that was possible concerning the great man, but he returned to Number Two when his wife asked Mrs. Tom's judgment as to the respective merits of green and yellow for hat trimming.

On the way home Uncle Tom said that old Barnaby ought to know Footit, and even talked of bringing his employer to Fog Lake at some time in the future to give him opportunity to meet a very rare man. He

talked a great deal about old Barnaby that night, and we learned that he had not spoken to his wife in a number of years, though they lived under the same roof. Uncle Tom had seen Mrs. Barnaby, and spoke of her as quite a handsome woman, from which I imagined that she must be much younger than her husband, and he said to Mrs. Tom that when she went to the City with him, they would call on the couple; he felt sure that she would be as much interested in them as he was in Footit and his wife.

During the drive home Mrs. Tom occupied a place beside her husband on the front seat, and while he talked in the old strain of his folly in being so desperately in love with her, there was something pathetic in all he said; he was always so lonely and so tired, while on the road, that when he came to Fog Lake he was ashamed of the peace and content he experienced, for he feared that in a little while he would be thinking up excuses to avoid coming home so often. This was not

said in a bantering or flippant way, but as a man might speak of the certainty that the one pleasant delusion left him would soon vanish, and leave him tired and lonely, and without hope of relief. We were quite a long time in driving home, and Uncle Tom did not once notice the presence of Number Two and myself on the back seat, but spoke of himself to Mrs. Tom as a spoilt child who was perfectly happy in the possession of a poor toy to be soon forgotten.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE OF THE LOVE STORY.

Uncle Tom spent the next day as he had spent the day before, in lounging about his room, and I doubt if Mrs. Tom paid him more attention than I did, for we were both with him constantly. Occasionally he talked with the greatest seriousness of his love for his wife, but I noticed that he always smiled at his declarations, as though they were ridiculous, as he always smiled when he nodded his head to declare that he would always love Mrs. Tom, or shook it to announce that he would never forget her; but it was the good-humored laugh of a man who might say that, having eaten heartily, he did not feel that he would ever be hungry again.

"I know better than to be in love," he said, from the easy-chair in which Mrs. Tom

had propped him in such a manner as to make him as comfortable as possible, "but there were so many things I wanted said, and you said them all, in almost the words I used in thinking of them, so I forgot old Barnaby, and the fact that a man in love is wretched because of doubts and jealousies, and ends by hating his wife. The people you know on the road (as you know a street, and care little for) think of everything to your discredit, and while much of their gossip concerning you is true, every one feels that there are a few things that can be said to his credit, and longs for some one to say them; this is the favor you have done me, for there is nothing to my credit that you have not expressed. I am possessed of very few virtues, but you mention them frequently. I am so grateful to you for this that it really seems to me that if I should lose you in any way, I should not care to live any longer; but when I realize that what I say in the most serious earnestness is nonsense, I fear that there is nothing serious

or worthy about me. I was never in earnest in my life until I fell in love with you; you are oftener in my thoughts than religion, business, and patriotism combined, and I cannot feel flattered when I reflect that this one enthusiasm of my life is liable to be forgotten in a year. I regret that love is not like the true religion, — something that you can be constant to all your life, and find a comfort when death itself comes; but it isn't; every man who has deserted his wife has probably felt love as keenly as I do, and expressed it in almost exactly the same words."

From something Uncle Tom said that day, I came to believe that old Barnaby was in the wrong in the quarrel with his wife; Uncle Tom said that were old Barnaby in his situation, he would not enjoy Mrs. Tom's company from thinking of the separation; that if he had a taste for liquor, he would be drinking it all the time, and find fault with his tipple after he had tired of its taste and effect. From this, and from other things that were

said, I imagined that Mr. Barnaby was a very unreasonable old man, and that his young wife was a very wretched and unfortunate woman. Old Barnaby's appetite was never satisfied, it seemed; when he got enough of one thing, he regretted that he ate that, and stormed around because he did not try something else.

"A man was hanged in the city last week for wife murder," Uncle Tom told us, "and I remember that, when the trial was progressing, the newspapers published his love letters. They were exquisitely beautiful, and I blushed when I saw that, in writing to his wife, the murderer had used many expressions I had used in writing to you; the fellow afterwards killed his wife because he hated her. I feel that my sex is disgraced when I recall such things, and I only do it to curb my ridiculous passion for you; you cannot imagine how ardently I wish that human experience would allow me to believe that I shall always be as happy as I am now. But when I finally tire of you, as old Barnaby did of his wife, I

hope you will not accuse me of being selfish and fickle, for I shall only tire of you when I cannot help it; because it is my nature, and I cannot rise above it. I hope you will charitably remember that the foolish earnestness of a fickle man is the only earnestness the world affords. The man who says he will never forget the town in which he lives, is in earnest, so far as he is capable of being in earnest in anything, and he should not be blamed when he moves away, and forgets the old home in admiring the new.

"Had I never been as fond of you as I am, I might conceal my disgust for you, when it finally comes, and live on with you as an amiable hypocrite, but I could never do it after loving you as I do now. I should prefer to confess my shame, and go off and live alone; I could never live a half-way life after living as happily as we have lived, — I should prefer absolute misery.

"I think I talk so much about my tiring of you finally as a means of warding off your

hatred when our humiliation comes; when you remember that I always said I would, you will think less horribly of me than you would if I had taken the most solemn vow to love you forever, for nothing displeases a man or woman so much as to detect another in a misrepresentation; we have excuses in plenty for ourselves, but little charity for others. Men make moral laws for the government of others from their ideals, but they are not themselves the good men they expect others to be. Had I never known old Barnaby, I should declare in the most solemn manner that I shall love you as I love you now forever, but, unfortunately, I know old Barnaby, and am subdued."

"I have never for a moment doubted that you will always be fond of me," Mrs. Tom said. "All that you have ever said of the probability that you will tire of me only convinces me that you never will. I think that at some time in your life some one must have accused you a great deal of being fickle, but I am certain that it was an unjust accusation."

There was something in the remark that set Uncle Tom to thinking, for he was silent a long time.

"I never knew any one, except you, who did not accuse me of it," he finally said. "My mother in particular accused me of it. 'Your love,' she used to say to me, 'reminds me of an appetite. A friend invites you to dine; you say his pudding is the best you ever tasted, and you believe it. Another friend invites you to dinner, and you forget all about the other pudding, though it was a good one, and say you never tasted anything so delicious as the latest mess placed before you. Your wife will be a very wretched woman.' I know better than to be in love, realizing how fickle I am, consequently I blush when I realize that there never was a school-boy as madly in love as I am."

It occurred to him that he had not declared himself for awhile, so he vigorously nodded his head, and then shook it, which amused Mrs. Tom, and caused her to declare that he was the best and dearest fellow in the world.

"I wish you and I had no better sense than to imagine that we were created for each other, and that nothing would happen to disturb the belief; but had I not appeared when I did, you would have married some other man, and been shocked at the suggestion that you could have loved me. Imagine that the other man (a foolish fellow, as I am, and jealous of what might have happened) had appeared first and become your husband, and I had appeared in town on a hunting expedition, and the other man should have pointed me out, and said, 'You might have married him.' What would you have done? You would have gone off and cried, and thought me horrid. What a ridiculous world it is; do you know, I have a pang of jealousy thinking of you crying because it was said you might have loved me? You will say yourself that this is silly, but it is not more silly than the fact that we make so serious a matter of that which might not have happened at all, and which will probably not exist at all after a time.

"We ought to be wiser than we are; this habit we have of making much of love will cause us a great deal of humiliation. When I have forgotten you, and I say to the second Mrs. Tom, 'Never was any one as necessary to a man as you are to me' (I am thinking that of you this moment), I shall remember you, and blush to such an extent that the second Mrs. Tom will suspect the cause, and abuse me as I deserve.

"Either you are a very cunning woman, or you have accidentally hit upon the only plan by which I can be managed. I think it is your natural way, though it may be policy, but you treat me so well that I am ashamed not to treat you in the same fashion. Whatever I want to do, you want me to do, and the result is I try to repay your goodness by trying to think what will be most agreeable to you. But if you should stand out a great deal for your rights, — Mrs. Barnaby has a great many rights, and it keeps her busy protecting them, — you would find me the meanest

man alive. I have often said to you that I am like the other men in the respect that I shall tire of a love affair; it is no more than fair that I should admit that I am also like them in having a disposition to quarrel after I have tired of my wife, and be meaner to a woman than I would dare to be to a man.

"It is a pity that other women do not adopt your idea, for it is a good one; men can be managed in that way better than in any other. Other women, no doubt, have contempt for you because of the manner in which you worship me; but you are wiser than they are; your worship is responsible for all the good there is in me. If you really meant it when you said I had made you happy, you are entitled to the credit, for I would have been like the rest of them had you bothered much about your rights. There are men enough to do the mean things; I think the women should be trusting and gentle. Surely you can't really think it of me; but you say you believe I am fair with you, and

that is the reason I try to be. If we should meet a lion in the road, you would believe me brave and strong enough to vanquish him, and though the sight of a lion would really frighten me, your confidence would cause me to fight him with more skill and bravery than would have been possible did I feel that you believed I would run away and leave you. In case old Barnaby should go out walking with Mrs. Barnaby — which is extremely improbable; indeed, I laugh at the thought — and they should meet a lion in the road, Mrs. Barnaby would at once accuse old Barnaby of being a coward, and run for her life."

Uncle Tom dozed off to sleep soon after, as though he gave himself up completely to enjoyment of his love affair, and talked of what might happen to prepare himself for something disagreeable a long way off; and the manner in which Mrs. Tom hovered over him convinced me that in her heart she did not doubt that her husband would always be as fond of her as he was then.

The Footits came to town during the day, Mrs. Footit walking ahead in state, smoking a pipe, followed by Footit, who carried the baby. Mrs. Footit came into the room where we were inquiring for the Boomer, but as he was not at home, she went away, after declaring that no Boomer on earth could swindle her through a weak husband.

Later in the day she called again, still looking for the Boomer, and then it was that we made the discovery that Bud had disappeared the night before. I believed he had gone away to become a pugilist, and I could not help remembering the gentle manner in which he sat beside his gentle father the night before, as though he thought more of him than he did of his mother, and was bidding him good-by.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE TACK.

THE man whom my father seemed to admire above all others was a certain Joe Tack, who was often at our house, and who promptly accepted everything he heard there, for he was a Boomer, too, and if my father had anything particularly desirable to offer in the way of a block of bonds or town lots, Joe Tack promptly took all he could get, and believed that his connection with our family was of great advantage. My father was always attempting to float something new by means of bonds, and these bonds were bought in great quantity by Mr. Tack, and he never objected to the price.

I don't think he paid very promptly, but I am certain that he never quibbled over the prices of my father's bonds or town lots, and

that he bought them as long as they were in the market. I have no doubt he would have paid had he been possessed of the means, for he was an honest fellow, though somewhat unfortunate in his business affairs.

Joe Tack believed there was money in a saw-mill, and although he had been unfortunate in the particular that his mills blew up before he had them on a paying basis, he fully expected that in time he would be able to find a sound boiler, and secure the means of paying for the lots and bonds he had purchased. One of the delights of Fog Lake boys was the regular excursion into the woods to see the remains of Joe Tack's saw-mill; the first time I ever saw him, I believe, he was being carried along the streets on one of his own boards, and when I went out to see him, I felt certain he had boiled himself for the last time, he looked so dreadfully bad; but he soon opened his eyes and said it was not the fault of the business, but of the boiler, and that everything would yet be all right.

I also thought he looked admiringly at the large crowd following him, and that his popularity in the neighborhood pleased him; and when his wife appeared, and gave vent to her grief in the most dreadful way, there was such a call for handkerchiefs that I thought the Boomer should order a new supply for the store, for Joe was always being blown up, and from long practice his wife was steadily becoming more touching in her grief.

When next we heard of him he was hard at work on a new mill, and although this blew up within a few months after it was started, Joe was off with my father on a booming expedition, and escaped.

Joe was large and good-natured, and firmly believed in all the Boomer's schemes, and probably made a good impression at the public meetings he attended, for he was quite distinguished looking, and I think the Boomer courted him because his good nature and satisfied way convinced the people that his investments in bonds and town lots and schemes

of every kind were profitable. He owned bonds in the corset factory, the watch factory, and the violin factory, and as these institutions had no other existence than a square in the printed map of the three additions to Fog Lake, the Boomer was naturally pleased to find a man who had invested in his schemes, and was free to say that he was well pleased.

Joe Tack's wife was the ugliest woman I have ever seen in my life, but Joe did not seem to know it; anyway, his devotion to her was everywhere talked of, and it was one of his boasts that while he could not run a saw-mill successfully, he was about the best husband on earth. Knowing from experience how dangerous they were, Joe would not permit his wife to go near the saw-mills, so she was often at our house while her husband was repairing his boiler after an accident, and though she was in every one's way, and was so silly that we could not admire her (although she was a good and a willing soul), we knew them both

very well, and patiently submitted to Mrs. Tack, because we all admired her husband. When not suffering from scalds and bruises, Joe Tack was a cheerful fellow, because of his confidence that he had at last remedied every difficulty in the boiler way, and it may have been that we originally regarded him as valuable in a business way, for while we knew he was always buying the family bonds and lots, we did not know for some years that he was unable to pay for them.

We discovered one evening why Joe was so fond of his wife. Mrs. Tack had been at our house several days, talking of seeing Joe on Saturday, and showing a bad set of false teeth when she smiled at the prospect, and although we did not expect him at all, he really came Saturday night, having been unable to get his boiler ready to fire up, which probably saved him.

It was a rainy night, I remember, for it was said that my father would probably not be able to return on that account from an

adjoining county, where he had gone to stir the people to action regarding another railroad; so it happened that there were no schemes to talk about, and after Joe had admired his wife as much as he wanted, and been reproached for neglect of her, he had time to talk of himself. He was always bringing his wife something, and this time it was a gold watch. It did not seem to be much of a watch, for it wouldn't run, and I imagined from its battered condition that he had traded for it somewhere. The watch brought about the conversation which gave me my ideas as to why he was such an admirable husband, for while he held it in his hand, he said, addressing his wife:

"I've seen her again."

I did not know what he meant, but his wife seemed to understand, for she became interested at once, and wanted to know where.

"Over at the mill," Joe replied. "There is a slab shanty there where I sleep, and some time during Thursday night I was awakened by a strange oppression in my breathing.

When I sat up in bed, there was a strange light in the room, and there she was — my first wife, and what do you suppose she was doing?"

None of us knew, of course, but we all looked as curious as possible, and Joe told us.

"She had this watch in her hand, and was crying over it as though she was sorry I hadn't given her one when she was alive. Sarah has been dead ten years, but she can't get over the way I treated her, it seems, for she frequently comes back to complain. I'll get a letter to-morrow. Whenever I say anything fond to the present Mrs. Tack, the ghost of the one that's buried reminds me by letter that I didn't treat her that way. Last Tuesday I wrote a letter to my wife in which I said that it did me good even to think about her, and within an hour after I had started it to town in care of a log-hauler, a stranger rode up and said he had been requested by a woman he met on the road to deliver a letter to Joe Tack. When I acknowledged that to be my name, he gave me

the letter and rode on. It was from Sarah, — no postmark, no stamp, but her writing without a doubt. It said, 'Had you been as fond of me' — but wait; I'll get the letter itself."

After a search he produced from his pocket a letter, evidently written on prize-package stationery, and read: —

"Had you been as fond of me, we might have lived very happily."

He threw the letter on the table after reading it, and said we might look at it, which we did, but could make out nothing save that it was written with purple ink, and apparently by a woman. While the letter was passing from hand to hand, Joe shook the watch, and, after holding it to his ear, said that he believed it would run had he not neglected to get a key with which to wind it.

Number Two looked at the watch, and examined it critically, but Number One was as dignified as usual, and paid no attention either to the watch or the conversation. My mother and Mrs. Tom were busy with some sort of

work, and paid so little attention that I have thought since that they must have heard all about Sarah before. Uncle Tom was up in his room doing some sort of writing, which explained why Mrs. Tom and I were not with him; neither of us ever left him except when it was necessary. I could not sleep well at night when he was at home, from thinking how much better time I would have with him than I could possibly have in sleeping.

Mrs. Tack did not seem to mind the references that had been made to her husband's first wife, from which I thought the subject was often talked of between them, and she explained to us without any show of feeling that there was no sense in the way Sarah carried on, as Joe had always treated her well. Joe had never given her a cross word, she said, and she might let him alone.

"I wish you could say I had never neglected her," Mr. Tack interrupted. "That's where I was to blame; I neglected her. I was young then, and didn't know how much

women make of little attentions; so I thoughtlessly neglected her. If I came home and found her crying, I thought maybe she had heard bad word from her folks, and said nothing; but I know now she was crying because I neglected her. It's a man's duty to make his wife happy, and when you find a woman who is unhappy, you will find a man who neglects to do his duty. It all rests with the man. I know men who are wasting their lives in quarrelling with their mates; they could with less difficulty make themselves reputations and happy homes. In other ways men have strong competition, and the making of a reputation is difficult, but in being good to his wife, it's like having the only post-office in the town, and getting your stamps for nothing; there is practically no competition."

Had I been older, the thought would, no doubt, have occurred to me that Joe Tack was making game of his wife, for I could not understand how any one could be fond of a woman so hideously ugly and hopelessly silly;

but as Mrs. Tack had no such suspicion, and seemed to enjoy it, I thought it was only one of his ways of amusing himself after his contests with the boilers, and as he stood by the mantel rubbing some sort of salve on his hammer sores, I thought that while he was very much mistaken in regarding his wife as a rare woman, except as to hideousness, he certainly was in earnest.

"Who is the most noted man in this country?" Joe said again, after stroking his wife's cheek, and predicting that he would get a letter for it. "You all know that I am, and that I have no greater recommendation than that I am good to my wife. I know as little as the law allows, but for doing my duty I am a noted man. Mrs. Tack is occasionally unreasonable, but always in a pretty way; but no matter; I am better than ever to her because of it, and it only adds to my reputation. I'll be in the legislature before I die, you see if I don't; and it will not be because I am a statesman, either, — it will be because

of the circumstance that I am good to my wife. I would have been there now had I commenced on Sarah. The men like me for it, as well as the women, for every man's theories are all right, and when I was last carried home, I was moved to tears by the length of the procession. Father was mean to mother, and I neglected Sarah, but I am on the right track now, and I'll stay there, no matter how many letters I get."

There was a sudden knocking at the front door, and when I opened it, a strange boy handed in a letter for Joe and disappeared. It was written on the same prize-package stationery, and addressed in purple ink, and I was not surprised to learn, as I did soon after, that it was from the first Mrs. Tack. Joe read it over himself, with a crestfallen countenance, and then read it aloud: —

"JOE, — I was better-looking than your present wife, and you must know it, yet you are kinder to her than you ever were to me.

"SARAH."

The reading of the letter threw Mrs. Tack into a great state of indignation, during which she said that it was clear that Sarah was no better-mannered as a spirit than she was when alive; but Joe pacified her by patting the warts and whiskers on her cheek.

"I should not have read the letter," he said. "I shall keep them to myself in future. Who wants to go out to the graveyard?"

There was a profound silence, which Joe Tack observed, and then explained that he was going out to see if Sarah's grave had been disturbed, for while he had received many letters from Sarah, personal visits were uncommon; therefore the house was ransacked for umbrellas, and when I came back into the room after an excursion into the garret with Joe, I found Mrs. Tack ready to go out. This aroused my interest to such an extent that I resolved to accompany them, and we soon after stepped out into the mud and rain.

There was a church in Fog Lake, which caused the women a great amount of trouble

to support, but which the men never seemed to worry about, and back of this was the graveyard, although my father had laid out a cemetery further away, and declared that the people should buy lots and improve them, neither of which they did. Toward the church we directed our steps, Joe Tack talking all the time about Sarah, and the queer way she had of expressing her disapprobation of his neglect. I had an idea we should find Sarah sitting on the grave, crying because of the fear that Joe would erect a monument when next he buried a wife, but we did not; we found nothing at all except the grave, which was in an out-of-the-way corner, and badly neglected. Joe lighted matches under his hat and looked for evidences of fresh dirt, but found none; so we returned home, where we found that Uncle Tom had come downstairs and was preparing to tell a story. After we had reported that there was no evidence that Sarah's grave had been disturbed, and seated ourselves, he began: —

CHAPTER IX.

THE STRANGE STORY OF MR. CANBY AND MR. OTHER.

I ONCE had an intimate friend in a certain Mr. Canby; a sentimental sort of a fellow, who had no great fault further than that he was in love with his wife. Being a matter-of-fact man myself, as you all know, and not given to the sentimental follies, I often warned him of his fault, and begged him to reform, but he said he imagined nothing serious would come of it, and went along in his old way.

I knew Mrs. Canby quite well, also, and was frequently at her home, and I sometimes thought that if ever a man had excuse for his folly, Canby was the man, for his lady was a most agreeable person and devotedly attached to him, besides being an admirable

woman in every way. But I did not forget my duty to my friend, and repeated my warning of the danger he was running. He laughed at my fears, in his good-natured way, and said what I called his folly was really his joy, and that his infatuation was of the greatest benefit to him; but Canby would not be warned, and I finally hoped that he was one of those sentimental fellows who would do himself no great harm if no great good.

But the storm came in spite of my hopes. He had suddenly ceased his visits to me, but as I imagined he was safe at home, more ridiculously in love than ever, but doing no harm, I did not look him up, though I often laughed to myself to think of how Canby, once a bright man, was carrying on. Therefore I was particularly shocked when he called on me one night and said he had a rival, and that he could never be happy again. This announcement shocked me beyond expression, for I had regarded Mrs. Canby as a model woman in all respects.

"My dear fellow," I said to him, "you certainly are not serious when you tell me that Mrs. Canby has been trifling with you?"

Oh, no, it wasn't that, he explained, but he had grown to think so much of his wife that he had created a phantom with which to torture himself. The more he knew of Mrs. Canby, my unfortunate friend said, the better he liked her, and as she gradually became so necessary to him that he could not think of doing without her, he began to think of how wretched he would have been had he not found her at all. Then he thought of his great loss in case he should die, and next he thought of his Phantom.

The Phantom was a certain Mr. Other, who would appear after his death and marry his widow. That, Canby said, was horror enough, but it was not the worst; he had a fear that his wife would gradually forget him, and love Mr. Other more than she had ever loved her first husband.

Of course I was distressed over my friend's

misfortune, but I could not help reminding him of my early warning: that his being in love with his wife would prove his ruin. He had at first imagined that being in love with his wife was a credit to him, and had enjoyed it immensely for awhile, and accused me of being crusty because of my warning, but finally the blow came, and he was wrecked.

The certainty that he might not have met his wife at all, and that she might have loved another as ardently as she loved him, came into his mind, and his ruin was completed by the possibility that she might become a widow, and deny to a second husband that she had ever loved Canby at all.

But his sorrow was so sincere that I soon ceased to taunt him, and tried to show him the absurdity of his latest folly; but he would not be argued out of it; he loved his wife so much that the thought that she would ever marry again, in the event of his death, crazed him, and he was now certain that he

would die soon, and give his place to a fellow of no merit named Mr. Other.

His case was worse than I deemed possible, I discovered after hearing more of it. Canby had taken to dreaming of Mr. Other, and saw him so often that he was able to describe him quite accurately.

In his dreams he saw Mr. Other living with Mrs. Canby, and heard their conversations. It was all so ridiculous that I could not keep from laughing, much as I respected my friend's feelings, for he repeated conversations he had heard in his sleep between Mr. Other and his widow.

"Dear Mr. Other" (one of the conversations was to this effect), "what a blank my life was before I met you! You are so good to me."

This caused Mr. Other (Canby said) to say he supposed she had said the same thing to her first husband, from which I imagined Mr. Other to be a ridiculous fellow, too; but Mrs. Canby declared (so the dream went) that while

she had respected Mr. Canby, she had married him to please her folks, and had really never loved before.

Of course I knew this to be absurd, and so did Canby, for he ran away with his wife, because her folks objected, and never was a woman more completely infatuated with a man than was Mrs. Canby with my friend.

But nothing would comfort Canby; at least, nothing I could say, though he made strange hints concerning the comfort of the dead. Everything his wife did, he said, only angered him since his dreaming commenced, for it only reminded him that the love which had once been so precious to him was only a prejudice to be forgotten in a year. His wife had said things to him which had caused him to feel that he was, perhaps, nobler than other men, and better; but he now knew that he was not, and that he would be as utterly forgotten as though he had never lived. He was, therefore, ready to die and forget his disgrace.

Another part of his idea was that his pun-

ishment after death would be to constantly attend Mr. and Mrs. Other, as an invisible, silent, and unhappy spirit: he would never be allowed to sleep, but compelled to attend his wife night and day, to be punished by her declarations that she never really loved Canby, and in witnessing her evidences of affection for Mr. Other.

It was quite horrible, the way he pictured his punishment for having been in love with his wife; but I feared I could do nothing for him, his case seemed utterly hopeless.

I went home with him at his request, and Mrs. Canby was as pretty as ever, though greatly distressed over her husband's gloomy demeanor. Nothing was the matter, he said, in answer to her anxious questions; oh, no, nothing at all; and when she brought his slippers, he looked at them with horror, as though he already saw Mr. Other's feet coming that way, and refused to put them on. She paid him great attention while I was there, but he did not recover his spirits; indeed, he grew steadily

worse, and within a month killed himself, leaving a note denying that suicides are ever insane, and declaring that men who kill themselves are really the philosophers, since every man is better off when he is dead.

The letter left by Canby was quite a remarkable document. "There are no wise men living," it said; "as soon as a man becomes wise, and realizes what he is living for, he kills himself. I only hope that the newspapers will not say that I killed myself while temporarily insane; should they say that I took my life while suffering from a temporary fit of wisdom, they would be nearer the truth."

Mrs. Canby's grief over the death of her husband was awful to see, and it was feared that she would become insane. They watched with her a long time, but finally it was deemed safe to leave her alone, and within a few months she was able to walk about. I occasionally met her, but, of course, said nothing with reference to her late husband's malady, though I thought to myself that if poor Canby

could have heard in his dreams what she said to me concerning him, he would not have killed himself, for a more loyal widow or a more distressed widow never lived. Only one course remained to her, she said: to join poor Canby as soon as possible on the Other Side, and I felt so much sympathy for her that I sometimes mentioned, when I thought she could bear it, how much her husband had thought of her.

About two years later a young gentleman came to town who created quite a stir in society. I did not hear of him until he had been there some months, for I am not given to things of that sort, but finally I heard so much of him, in spite of myself, that I inquired his name.

His name was Mr. Other, they told me, and I took an interest in him at once, though his connection with Canby's dream was probably only a coincidence, for I found out by means of cautious inquiries that he knew Mrs. Canby only slightly.

I looked him up, however, and made his acquaintance. Certainly a handsomer fellow than Canby, I thought, though not so bright, but he was evidently as foolish, for he seemed to think a great deal of love. In spite of myself I liked the young fellow, though I expected that Canby would haunt me for it, and he talked to me at times concerning his love affairs, which seemed to be more important in his mind than anything else. He had met the charming Mrs. Canby, he said, and I accepted the opportunity to do my friend justice, which I thought he listened to with more than passing interest.

For some reason he avoided me after this conversation, and I did not see him again until I met him as the husband of Mrs. Canby. The meeting was under exceedingly odd circumstances; they had both avoided me for months, and I was, therefore, surprised when he called on me one evening, very much as Canby had done before.

He apologized for his visit, and explained the

object of it at once; he was very much in love with his wife, and was constantly haunted with the fear that she had thought more of her first husband than she thought of him; he knew I was an old acquaintance of Mr. Canby's, and had resolved to ask me the question, though it caused him much pain.

I felt it my duty, though the circumstances were painful in the extreme, to do justice to my dead friend, so I told Mr. Other plainly that his wife had certainly seemed fond of her first husband, who was an excellent man, and my intimate friend, and I related, when he urged me, many things I had heard her say and seen her do, as evidence that Mr. Canby had been highly esteemed by his wife.

Mr. Other was in a strange way at once, declaring that he had suspected it all the time, and that in future he would think with pleasure of nothing but the grave. It also turned out that everything loving I had ever heard Mrs. Canby say to her first husband, she had repeated to her second, and while I

tried to comfort Mr. Other, I knew it was impossible. He raved a great deal about his love for his wife, and how he felt when he realized that every little attention shown him had been shown to another, and he also said that he would have been a perfectly happy man had Canby never existed. He insisted upon my going home with him, and as we walked along, he said that although his wife had confessed to him that her life had been a blank before they met, and that she had never before known what love was, he believed she had forgotten, and that she was passionately fond of a man who had taken his own life because of some discreditable circumstance of which no one knew anything.

I thought this a very wise remark on the part of Mr. Other, for it is one of the absurdities of love that those under its spell will earnestly deny their earnestness on previous occasions. While I knew that Mrs. Canby had been thoroughly in love with her first husband, I had no doubt that she firmly be-

lieved that the love of her life was with Mr. Other, and that she had been forced into the marriage with Mr. Canby, or something of that kind. There is no sincerity in love, though we all believe there is.

I am sorry now that I did not tell Mr. Other why Canby had killed himself, for he hated his memory, and sneeringly repeated his belief that Canby had suicided because of some sort of dishonor, in spite of my statement that I knew better.

"If you knew differently," Mr. Other said, "you would say so. I am satisfied that Canby was a scoundrel, for I have been able to hear little good of him in this neighborhood, and think of my humiliation when I realize that Mrs. Other was once fond of him; think of my feelings when I think of his having touched her, damn him! I really love the woman, but that fellow was an adventurer."

His hatred for Canby was very intense, but I thought best to say nothing.

I am candidly of the opinion that Mrs.

Other thought more of her second husband than of her first, for when I called upon her, in company with Mr. Other, at an unusual hour, she had no hesitancy in throwing her arms about him, and inquiring what was the matter, and why he was acting so of late. Nothing was the matter, he said, and the reply reminded me of Canby; and when she brought his slippers and wanted to put them on his feet, he kicked them away, fearing, no doubt, that they were Canby's, as I believe they were. But nothing was the matter; he kept saying that all the evening, in answer to her appeals, and she was certainly more distressed over his strange behavior than she had been over Canby's.

Canby had shot himself; Mr. Other took poison in his wife's presence, and died in frightful convulsions, after declaring that he committed suicide not because he was insane, but because he was too wise a man to live and suffer as he had been suffering for the past few months. During his convulsions, in-

deed, he roared out that he felt better than for months past, but to the last refused to tell why he had taken his life.

I was one of the pall-bearers at both funerals, and they were both very distressing. In both cases it was feared that the distressed wife would lose her reason, and she was watched several days for fear she would take her own life; but she never did, and when I last saw her she was quite resigned again in the love of a third husband.

Mr. Canby and Mr. Other were buried side by side, and if ever graves quarrelled, theirs did.

I often passed that way, and it seemed to me that the grave of Mr. Other wore a perpetual grin because its monument was the higher, so I stole poor Canby's body one night, and buried it elsewhere, erecting at its head a monument taller than Mr. Other's, which bore no other inscription than this: "A Victim of Too Much Love; There is Another in This Cemetery." No one knows

I stole the body, and to this day there is great wonder in that neighborhood as to who the two unfortunate gentlemen were who died of Love.

CHAPTER X.

UNCLE TOM WRITES A LETTER.

I LEARNED with regret the next morning that Uncle Tom had gone away on the early train, before daylight, and when I met Mrs. Tom she asked me to read the following letter, as evidence that her husband was the best fellow in the world: —

"DEAR MRS. TOM, — I sat down with a view of writing old Barnaby that I would not return for another week, but the demands of business are pressing, so I concluded instead to write you of my regret at leaving to-morrow morning, for, in justice to myself and you, I must hurry away. I enjoy myself so much when at home with you that I am afraid to remain too long, — afraid that my contentment will cause me to rebel against ever

going away again. That would be a misfortune for both of us.

"I am writing this alone, although under the same roof with you, as a sort of preparation for my departure; I am schooling myself for something that is very disagreeable to me. I am ashamed of myself when I realize how foolishly sentimental I am over you. While I am away I hurry through each day, and long for night, because it will put me one stage nearer the happy time when I shall start home to see you; I only consent to sleep at night, because it permits me to spend a few hours in forgetfulness of the fact that I am not with you. All this looks absurd as I write it, but I cannot convince myself that it is not true.

"I wonder that any man of fair intelligence can be as fond of a woman as I am of you; that a woman can exert the influence over a man that you exert over me. I do not mean to be impious when I say that I have found in you that peace and courage which should

come from conversion and piety; had I found in piety the peace you have brought to me, I should have become an evangelist, and urged my fellow-men to seek that which has comforted me so much. It seems to me that this is folly, but perhaps it would not so seem had I not caught a bad contagion from contact with the world; I know something of the world, and the world says the contentment I have found in Fog Lake is the contentment that should come from religion.

"Although you know more of my inner life than all other living persons combined, I doubt if even you know how severely I criticise myself, or how rigidly I examine everything I accept as the truth. I have spent a great many hours in trying to discover why I am more contented when with you than when away, and why you are more to me than hope and ambition; indeed, I have no hope, now that I know you, and no other ambition than to cause you to always esteem me as highly as you seem to now. But I can make nothing out of the problem

further than that you are wonderfully agreeable to me; when I am on the road, I am cold, and damp, and uncomfortable, but when I come home you warm me and rest me; you lead me in such pleasant paths that the disagreeable thoughts that come to me on the road never occur to me at all.

"You once said that I had never been unjust to you in my life. I am afraid that my desire to deserve that compliment is as great as any other man's desire to deserve the forgiveness of his Redeemer; I fear that I spend as much time in thinking of that remark as a man should think of the hope that all his sins have been forgotten.

"If you are able to say at the close of your life that I have never been unjust to you, that will be happiness enough for me, unless you should be able to add that I deserved the confidence and respect you so cheerfully gave me. It seems to me that if I continue to deserve your wonderful confidence, and that if you can say in your last days that I have

never been unjust to you, I shall have lived the life of a good man.

"I laugh at the heathen who goes to a wooden idol with all his sorrows, and receives comfort; perhaps the heathen would laugh at me should he be told of the god I worship. I should think old Barnaby ought to be religious, for he has found nothing in the world to please him; but if I should attempt to worship something away off in the sky, with Mrs. Tom sitting by me, I think I should laugh at the absurdity of the proceeding; not that I am an impious man, but because I should honestly feel that way.

"I have often spoken in jest of the time when I shall tire of you. I believe you know that the time will never come, but I doubt if you know that I really fear that I am too fond of you. I know what can be safely expected of a woman, and by this I mean no more than that I know a woman is human. But I have tested you beyond the limit, and you have never disappointed me; therefore I

have come naturally to regard you as more than a woman. There is nothing that I covet that you are not to me, and, should you fail me, I should never know another contented moment. I do not believe that you ever will, though it would be natural for you to, for I know that I expect too much.

"This is the reason I say that I am too fond of you; your connection with me has been so perfect that I fear that I could not now excuse an action in you that would be no more than natural.

"If one of the trains on which I travel should go through a bridge a thousand miles away from you, and I should be pinned to the earth beneath a mass of burning wreck, I should expect you to rescue me. There would be no reason in it, but you never did fail me, and somehow in my despair I should expect you to save me; I should bear up bravely until there was no hope, and then die, believing you had forgotten me. This is what I mean when I say I am too fond of you.

"Old Barnaby hates his wife with an exaggerated hate she does not deserve. I fear that I love mine with an exaggerated love she cannot deserve. If I were dying, and wanted you to accompany me into the grave, I believe you would do it. There is no limit to my faith in you, and it is because you have always been more than I expected, and everything that I needed.

"You may not know that nothing amuses the people so much as to hear that any one is desperately in love. The reason is that the people have been in love, and they know how little there is in it; they know that a man or a woman may feel one month that their love is everything to them, and then laugh at their own folly the next. Every one has felt in his life that while others might be fickle, his love was divine and eternal; but he has discovered later that his love was like every love: a deep wound to heal, and leave no scar; so the world has come to laugh at a love affair, and the world has reason to be

amused when a new case of heart-sickness presents itself. When I was a boy I had a complaint called water-brash, and though I was dreadfully sick for a few moments, my mother laughed at my deep concern of the consequences, knowing that in a little while I would be as well as ever. Much as she loved me, I believe she would have laughed in much the same way had I confessed to being in love.

"If I should ask in a crowd of people if they remembered the foolish joy they experienced before recovering from any of their love affairs, there would be a knowing smile on every face; but if I should continue, and tell them that I could not recover from my folly, and that I actually continued to enjoy the delight of being in love for months and months after my marriage, the knowing smile would disappear from every face, and I would be looked upon as a crazy man.

"If I should meet an adult person who had not outgrown the story of Santa Claus, I

believe I should laugh myself; people laugh at those who are in love very much as they laugh at children who believe in the good old man who drives the reindeers, but they all believed in Santa Claus once themselves.

"If I have a saint in whom I believe, I think the reason is that my good saint has convinced me of her existence, in spite of my worldly knowledge. If a big white-whiskered man should come into my room every Christmas by means of a very small chimney, and give me a blessing that I could feel, and many good gifts besides, I should believe in Santa Claus.

"You are the good saint that I believe in, and I can only say in excuse of my folly that it has always honestly seemed to me that whenever I needed help, you gave it to me from a rich storehouse, and it proved to be help better suited to my needs than I could have suggested. I sometimes fear that you must recognize your own weakness, and think ill of me because of my blind faith in

you; but you will pity my weakness when you know that I have always longed to give myself up to a charm of forgetfulness, and that I have discovered, after recklessly enjoying my abandon, that the magic spell you have exercised over me has always been for my good.

"TOM"

CHAPTER XI.

NUMBER ONE ASSERTS HIMSELF.

A FEW weeks after Uncle Tom's return to the road, I made a discovery that changed the course of my life, and sent me on a journey which will have much to do with this story.

I walked into the best room one morning, and saw at once that I had interrupted my father and mother in a grave discussion with Number One, for while they stopped talking when I entered, I thought I could detect that they had been seriously discussing a very important matter with him. I had always been allowed to believe that I was of considerable importance in the house, so I don't know that I felt any presumption in imagining that I would be able to assist them in solving the knotty question; perhaps I would be able to square an old grudge I entertained for Num-

ber One, who occasionally had the hardihood to dispute with me; so I sat down and waited patiently for the conversation to be resumed.

When I looked at them, I observed a sort of assurance in the face of Number One that convinced me that whatever the conversation was about, my father and mother had the worst of it, for they both looked worried, as though they had just heard several truths which it was exceedingly uncomfortable for them to admit.

"There is no reason why his presence should interrupt the conversation," Number One said, rather impatiently; "you all seem to be afraid of him, and that is one reason why he is idle and worthless. I am talking of you, sir."

He turned upon me in his splendid way, and looked at me coolly as I turned color and gasped for breath, for I realized in an instant that while they had been talking of me, my father and mother felt that the unfavorable things he said were true; they gave evidence in their faces of being unable to answer his arguments. I had felt all my life

that my mother's fondness for me was shared by every one with whom I came in contact, with the possible exception of Number One, but the idea was dispelled at one cruel blow.

"The German boys who live across the street," Number One continued, "wore wooden shoes five years ago, and could not speak a word of English, yet one of them is in the bank now, and the other is earning wages at a trade; while this boy of yours, who has had every opportunity, amounts to nothing at all. The truth is, he has been spoilt by his indulgent mother, and it is wrong; it is time that some one should speak, and speak the disgraceful truth."

I had hoped that my father would defend me, but he did not, for he only said that there was a man in town he hoped to induce to build a factory, and made preparations to go out, though as he stood with the open door in his hand, he said that he had been ill-used when a boy, and that he had made up his mind that his son should do as he

pleased; if his son turned out badly, he would be sorry, but he could not help it. He had regretted that I was not more industrious, and that I did not take more kindly to useful things, but he was not a manager, and had turned me over to my mother; if she had made a mistake in her course with me, he was sure it was the result of an indulgence he had always coveted as a boy, and he could only regret it.

"But, father," my mother said, immediately after the door closed upon the Boomer, as though she felt that I depended upon her to say something to my credit, since my father had failed, "Chance is only twelve years old, and I don't intend that he shall learn a trade; we will do better by him than that."

"Nonsense," the old gentleman said, impatiently. "You are not a Princess; you cannot bring him up as a Prince, although you have attempted it. He is contracting such habits of idleness now that he will always be idle. He was never corrected in his life; whatever he has

wanted to do he has done, and there has been no one to tell him that he was wrong. It is shameful; if you won't do it, I will tell him that his idleness is town talk, and that much is said concerning his impudence."

"You were never so strict with me," his daughter insisted. "I have been no more lenient with him than you were with me. In recollection of your kindness in my girlhood, I should not be less thoughtful of my own child."

"But you did not need the care this fellow does; you were an Olmstead, and a girl; but Chance is a boy, and a Bennington, and he needs governing. He must be controlled and put to work, or I leave the house."

The argument lasted half an hour, and I was more and more convinced, as it proceeded, that my grandfather was right, and that there was really no foundation for anything my mother said. I remained in the room, hoping that she would think of something to encourage me, but she did not, though she certainly tried as hard as she could.

I hope I do not fail in respect to my family when I say that I was almost inclined to take the part of my grandfather, and feel resentment because I had not been brought up differently; I had always been permitted to do as I pleased, and as the neighbors did not feel like pointing out my defects, I had remained in ignorance of my own weaknesses.

I believe my mother's idea was that when I became a little older, the business-men of the place would call upon me, and beg that I assist them in their affairs; indeed, I remember that she said, during the talk with her father, that when I was a little older, he would see that the banker would want my services, and that I would replace the German boy; but the old gentleman was firm in his conviction that I was idle, and worthless, and impudent, and talked of the matter so plainly that I almost became convinced of it myself. There had been a time when I imagined that Number One disliked me because he realized that I was his principal opponent there in

intelligence and learning; but I knew better now, and felt thoroughly ashamed of myself.

All this humiliated me so much that I resolved to run away, and go to the City, where I hoped to find Uncle Tom, and opportunity to distinguish myself. So I bolted out of the room, resolved to take nothing with me save the clothing I had on. My mother called after me, and was greatly frightened, but I heard her father say it was only my idle bravado, and that I would soon return. But for this my determination to leave Fog Lake might have failed me, for it seemed a dreadfully bold thing to do, but my indignation increased as I walked hurriedly through the town, resolved to go to the City, where I hoped to find Uncle Tom, for he usually spent several days there after a trip of four or five weeks. He would certainly be there within a few days after my arrival, so I was determined to go to the City and tell him how I had been treated. Who has forgotten the dread and fear with which he at first left home? I do not

believe I could have felt worse than I did had I been walking to the grave where I was to be buried; walking because I was so poor that I could not afford a hearse, and alone because I was so friendless that I could not afford a procession.

In order to avoid seeing any one who might know me, — for I imagined that if my intention to run away should be discovered, all of Fog Lake would turn out to prevent my going, — I sat out to walk to a station four miles below, where the train was due about seven o'clock in the evening. I had saved up a small amount of money, which I accidentally had about me, but I took nothing else. I was sorry I was compelled to take even the money, for I wanted the folks at home to feel that I was so high-spirited, and so confident of my own ability, that I had gone out into the world without a penny, certain that I could win my own way. I fear that I wanted to worry them all as much as possible, but as I trudged wearily along the road, I am not sure

that the hope did not enter my head that I would be overtaken by some one in a spring wagon, for I became dreadfully tired.

The road lay through an extensive tract known as the Brooper Woods, where it was said there were panthers, which cried at night like lost children, to induce travellers to approach them. The land was owned by speculators, and it was a dismal place even in the daytime, for it always seemed damp under the trees, as though there was more rain there than anywhere else. It was also said that a witch and her seven daughters lived in the Brooper Woods, who disguised themselves as honest women, and told mischievous lies to travellers passing through, and I hoped that if I escaped the panthers, I should not meet a strange woman who would inform me that the person I sought was at home, and anxious to see me, for that would be a very unfavorable sign.

Joe Tack had removed his saw-mill to that part of the country, and although I think he

was an interloper, there was so little prospect of his getting the mill running that he was not interfered with. I stopped a few moments to talk with him on reaching his place, but he did not inquire where I was going. Indeed, he seemed rather offended that I did not take an interest in his affairs, for while hammering away at his boiler, he told me that he had seen his first wife again, and looked through his pockets for a letter he had lately received, but he did not find it, and soon went off to the other side of the building, when I slipped away, feeling that my grandfather was right in his contemptible opinion of me.

The people I met on the road and those I met around the station looked at me with an indifference which caused me to secretly wish for a time that they could know that I was regarded as the smartest boy in Fog Lake, and that I was running away because I was not appreciated, and the idea even occurred to me that in case a pursuing party should dash into

the station, and forcibly prevent my leaving, it would be a sort of triumph over those who regarded me with so little interest. I also thought that in that case I would have the satisfaction of thinking that I could have accomplished all that was ever expected of me had I been permitted to go out into the world; but the humiliating thought soon came to me that I had been found out, and denounced by my grandfather, and that probably no one cared what became of me. So the hour I was to wait at the station slipped rapidly and uncomfortably by, and as the prospects of a rescue grew smaller, I felt more and more like crying, for I believe now that I had never doubted that in some way my intention would be discovered, and my going away prevented, and that my cunningly devised plan of escape would be thought of as additional evidence that I was a particularly bright boy, as well as a boy of spirit.

Going to the City alone seemed easy enough while I was at home, but I regarded it with

horror as I stood shivering on the platform waiting for the train. Still, there was a hope that the telegraph would be brought into use, in which event I would be taken in charge some time during the night; so when the train was nearly due I bought a ticket for the City, nearly all my precious money being required for the purpose. I had once thought that should a boy like I was buy a ticket for the City, the circumstance would attract comment; but it did not, and I went aboard the train when it arrived feeling that I had not a friend in the world.

Had I been experienced, I could have secured a comfortable seat in a chair car with my ticket, but I supposed there was an extra charge for that, so I went into a crowded car where there were crying children, and fretful mothers with surly husbands, and wondered how I should pass the night, as the train would not arrive in the City until the following morning. Occasionally a train-boy came through, who looked at me as though he

expected I would try to steal something out of his basket; but I thought he would have regarded me in a different light had he known that my father kept a store of his own, and that I had been free to take oranges and figs all my life.

There was a long delay about eight o'clock, when many of the passengers went out to lunch, but after that the train made short stops, and ran very rapidly. Sometimes I wondered if the train-men realized how rapidly we were going, but while I was thinking about it with alarm, the conductor would come in, seat himself, and quietly look over the papers he took from his pocket; or the brakeman would come in and take a drink of ice-water with the greatest unconcern, keeping his feet in a manner which I greatly admired. I argued from this that there was no danger, and finally went off to sleep, awaking at break of day with a pain in my shoulders, and an indication of a cold in my head.

I at once felt certain that the train was run-

ning away, and that the men in charge of the engine must have fallen off. We were running along a river, and so very rapidly that it seemed impossible to believe that any sane man would permit it. The other passengers were sleeping, and while I was thinking that I might do something to save the train and the people, and distinguish myself in such a manner as to cause those at home to feel that they had neglected me, there was a sharp blast from the engine whistle, and we soon stopped for a moment at a lonely place where there were few lights, when we went on again.

Being compelled to give up the heroic plan, I took a kind of delight in thinking that I must be on a train which was making the fastest time on record, and that when the fact was mentioned in the City papers, I should send a copy home, with a marginal note to the effect that I was one of the passengers.

Before I had done congratulating myself, the danger was over, for the train began slowing up, and we were soon in the City.

CHAPTER XII.

I AM SURPRISED.

ABOUT the first person I met after leaving the train was Bud Footit, who greeted me with the lofty indifference that might distinguish a City man who was bothered a great deal by acquaintances from the country, though he became more friendly when he saw that I was utterly lost in the noisy and rushing crowd. He appeared to have some sort of business there, for he was in a hurry, and as I followed him around I learned that he was employed at a milk depot, and that his house expected a large number of cans on that train. I had known that Bud had gone away, although I did not know where, and there was a keen sense of disappointment in realizing that I was not the first Fog Lake boy who had gone away to the City. I also felt a timid

disgrace because Mrs. Footit's boy, a fellow of no consequence, did not mind the noise and crowd of the City, while I was very much impressed with both, and I think I humbly accepted it as evidence that when my absence was discovered at home, there would be general rejoicing.

Bud had an air with him which indicated that he had improved on Uncle Tom's lessons in fighting, for when we went ahead to see about the milk cans, he spoke sharply to a man who came near running into us with a truck, and said to me that he had a notion to hit the fellow for luck.

A wagon belonging to Bud's house soon arrived; and after I had helped load the cans into it, I climbed into the seat with Bud and the driver, and started up into the City. Bud said he knew where Barnaby & Co.'s place was, and would set me down there; and as we drove along he explained that while he frequently passed the place, he had not yet stopped in to inquire for Uncle Tom, as he had

no doubt that Uncle Tom, even if he should be at home, would as soon see a ghost as any of the Fog Lake grays. I did not know what a gray was, so Bud explained that they were "countries," and that I was one, which did not increase my confidence in a welcome from Uncle Tom; and to make matters worse, I feared that Uncle Tom's associates would see me alight in front of the establishment from a milk wagon.

The driver of the wagon, who was a young fellow, too, but older than Bud, seemed to have the greatest respect for Mrs. Footit's boy, for in a conversation they carried on, evidently for my benefit, I learned that my friend had already distinguished himself; that he was known in sporting circles as "Bud, the Country," and that he had engaged in six fights in four weeks, easily winning, except in one instance when he was hit with a rock. They were going out that night to "do" the young fellow who had thrown the rock, who would probably be found in company with

four associates in an alley known as Howler, and as a special mark of favor they invited me to accompany them, which kindness I was compelled to decline with thanks, owing to other engagements.

The wagon finally stopped in a busy street, and I saw with a shudder a modest sign on a very large building containing the name "Barnaby & Co." Bud gave me a card containing the address of the house for which he worked, and I alighted promising to see him again, for I thought that in case Uncle Tom was on the road, I might find it necessary to remain with Bud until his return, though I made up my mind that I would not call until the next day, for I was certain that I had no business that night in Howler Alley.

In the hope that the clerks at Barnaby & Co.'s had not seen me on the milk wagon, I resolved to stroll around for awhile, and appear at the door from another direction, and this I did, taking my breakfast before returning. When I could no longer find excuse for

remaining away, I walked into the store and inquired of a man who was rolling a barrel if Mr. Tom Saulsbury was in. He answered gruffly that he was in the office, and I walked back to where a number of clerks were employed, but Uncle Tom was not among them. In answer to another inquiry, one of the clerks replied very civilly that Mr. Saulsbury was in the office, at the same time pointing to a door marked "Private." While thinking that the important employés were more civil than the unimportant ones, and that I should probably find old Barnaby glad to see me, I pushed the door open and stepped into a room comfortably equipped for business. At a large desk, with his back toward me, sat Uncle Tom, engaged in looking through a lot of papers. When I laid my hand on his shoulder, he turned quickly, as though he was not accustomed to such a familiarity, and the look he gave me left no doubt that he was displeased. He resumed his work without speaking, after looking at

me, and continued running through his papers, but without any purpose, and without doing anything with them, for I noticed that his eyes sought the window, and that he looked vacantly at nothing while holding the papers in his hand. Finally he inquired, still staring out of the window: —

"When did you come?"

I told him, and he again tried to resume his work, but without success, and I felt so queer that I had a notion to leave the room. He was not the same man at all, except in looks, and when he muttered that he was very busy, and that I should sit down until he had more leisure, I took a seat at one side, and looked at him in astonishment.

Several of the clerks I had seen in the outer office came in to discuss various matters with him, and his conversation with them was short and business-like; he was not at all like the good-natured fellow I had admired so ardently in Fog Lake. One of the clerks, before commencing to discuss the business he had in

hand, looked curiously at me, and Uncle Tom saw this, and said it was all right, without turning around, and the business went on. Although Uncle Tom was given to all sorts of idleness when at home, not a superfluous word escaped him here, and once it happened that two of the men were in the room at the same time, the second to arrive waiting near the door for his turn, and looking at me with a great deal of curiosity. Uncle Tom knew this without looking up, for he soon dismissed the first man, saying he would see him in the afternoon, and talked with the other one, deciding whatever was wanted with a few words.

Men who evidently had no connection with the house came in, and talked about matters concerning which I knew nothing, and had never heard. Some of these greeted Uncle Tom quite familiarly, but always with great politeness, and knowing his disposition, I wondered that he did not go out in town, and enjoy himself with them. But instead of this

he said as little as possible to all callers, and made several engagements for the afternoon. The only thing I could make out of it was that old Barnaby was sick, and that Uncle Tom had been called in from the road to take his place, which I thought of as quite an honor for our family; but none of the visitors inquired how old Barnaby was getting along, and none of them seemed surprised to find Uncle Tom occupying his place.

After I had been watching this strange proceeding for two or three hours, there was a lull in the affairs of the house, and Uncle Tom acted as though he had a notion to speak to me.

"Don't you begin to suspect something?" he said, in a manner which was not at all like him.

Believing that he meant that I ought to realize by that time that he was not glad to see me, and that it was my duty to get away as soon as possible, I explained that I was sorry I had annoyed him with a call, but

that while he had never invited me, he had certainly never intimated that I should not call at Barnaby & Co.'s and ask for him.

He did not reply immediately, but looked awhile in silence at a spot on the window, which seemed to be a favorite with him, for he had looked at the same place before.

"I don't mean that," he said, after awhile, without looking at me. "Doesn't something else occur to you?"

I hadn't the remotest idea what he meant, and said so.

"Well, then," he replied, still looking at the favorite spot on the window, "I'm old Barnaby."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BARNABY.

My first impression was that it was my duty to be indignant, and spring up in a tragic manner, and denounce him in behalf of the family. I think every one has an exaggerated idea of his family honor as distinguished from his own, but my admiration for the man was so strong that I found that I lacked the courage to do it, so I did not say anything at all, though there was a flutter at my heart when I remembered how Mrs. Tom would receive the news. She had been so happy, poor girl; I thought the shock would kill her.

I at first felt a faintness and horror when I thought of my uncle making an innocent accomplice of Mrs. Tom in a wrong, but I remembered that he did not seem to be that sort of a man, and felt that in justice to all

parties I should wait till I knew more of the matter before denouncing him. He had been an ideal man to me so long that I could not accept him at once as an ideal fiend, and I felt sure that there must be explanations that would relieve my friend; but however guilty I might have believed him, I could not at once shake off my old admiration for him.

I could not even act independently of him, for when he put on his hat, and intimated that I was to go out with him, I followed without saying a word, and soon found myself in a private room in a restaurant, where I imagined he frequently lunched, for the attendants seemed to know him, and spoke of him as Mr. Saulsbury.

It was evidently his intention to talk to me concerning the matter when he ordered the private room, for we could have lunched equally well, and cheaper, downstairs; but he changed his mind, apparently, for he only said with reference to an explanation that he had better explain it to Mrs. Tom, who would understand it better.

Although he did not inquire about Mrs. Tom, — I thought he was ashamed to do that, — he gave evidence of his old regard for her in many ways, and once said that as she had perfect confidence in him, he could deceive her if circumstances required it, but that it wasn't necessary, and he wouldn't do it, anyway. I had never seen him so much disturbed before, and I thought it remarkable that he ordered and drank off several glasses of liquor, for I had heard him say that while he had his faults, he did not drink. He was as polite to me as I could have expected had I been an agreeable guest, but he had a way of forgetting I was in the room, which distressed me on his as well as my own account, and there was a sort of recklessness in his manner which made me think that had an enemy of his come into the room in an equally bad humor, there would have been a fight.

Once he said he was glad that it was I who had found him out, instead of a stranger; which I understood as an intimation that he

thought I would be of use in straightening matters out, or in keeping matters quiet. He had often wondered who it would be; for a long time he had been expecting some one from Fog Lake to step into his office as I had done, and every footstep had frightened him, and he was glad that it was over; he had dreaded the plunge into the cold water, but felt better now that he was out of it.

This led him up to saying that while it looked rather bad, it was really all right, and that Mrs. Tom would understand it. He said this in a way which convinced me that he believed I would accept the statement unhesitatingly; there was that in his manner which made me think that he would not deceive a friend, and that he regarded me as a friend, therefore when he said it was really all right, and that Mrs. Tom would understand it, I believed that what he said was true; I could never change the impression he then gave me, and though my faith in him was greatly tried at times, I continued to believe that in time

he would make a satisfactory explanation. He had a certain respect for his own cause which impressed me greatly, and his manner of accepting me as a friend to whom it was not necessary to make explanations — who believed in him, anyway, as Mrs. Tom did — impressed me still more, and I was content to wait until such time as he saw fit to demonstrate that he deserved my confidence.

In referring to Mrs. Tom, there was something so touching and confident in his voice that I resolved to tell her of it when we met, knowing that she would be pleased, for the slightest reference to her would soften his tones at once; he evidently felt that Mrs. Tom would understand his situation, and that she would believe whatever he told her, and do whatever he advised, confident that his statements would be true, and his advice good.

We spent an hour in walking about after the dinner, and I thought Uncle Tom was trying to decide what had better be done with me; but he did not ask my opinion on

the subject, for he seldom spoke to me while on the streets, and not at all except to explain something which attracted my attention. It had occurred to me once at home that a gloomy man would have felt ashamed of himself on encountering my good-natured uncle, but it seemed from the evidence before me that my uncle was a gloomy man himself in the City, but he recovered from his mood perceptibly after fixing on a plan with reference to me; he did not tell me what it was, but I knew the exact moment when he made up his mind, for he returned to Barnaby & Co.'s at once, and resumed his place at the desk.

I sat down near him, and occasionally he tossed me a book or a paper with which to amuse myself, but he had little to say. Only a few persons came in to see him, and two or three times he went out alone, remaining some time. After the lights were lit in the gloomy place, he came back into the office, and asked me to write a letter, which I did from his dictation, as follows: —

"DEAR MOTHER, — I am now in the City, and you need not worry concerning me. I found Uncle Tom at home, but he is going away in a few days, and will take me with him, to a place which he has thought of that will satisfy you. When I am finally settled, I will write you again. With much love for all,

"C."

This was sealed, directed, and stamped, although I did not like the idea of sending my love to Number One, and on our way up town we posted it in a letter-box. We dined at a different restaurant in another part of the City, but did not take a private room, and met a good many people who knew Uncle Tom, and spoke to him. When we came out, and started to return down town, it was quite dark, and as my uncle had not intimated in any manner what disposition he intended to make of me, I followed when he walked up a pair of steps leading to a resi-

dence in a quiet side street, and entered at the front door after he had unlocked it. There were a number of doors in the hall-way which we entered, and a stair leading to the rooms above, and without making a light he unlocked the door nearest him, and we went into the room which looked out into the street. Here he made a light, and made preparations for spending the night. There were three rooms on that floor, all connected and substantially furnished. The one in front might have been a parlor, or reception-room, or an office, for it partook of the qualities of all three. In the middle one was suspended a shaded lamp over a large square table, and in the back room was a bed, a very large and luxurious one, with a canopy top.

I noticed all this while Uncle Tom was finding excuses to keep from talking to me, in looking for his slippers and opening the shutters; and when he had found his slippers, he lay down on a lounge with his hands folded behind his head, as I had seen him so

often at Fog Lake. I was seated in an easy-chair near him, thinking of the strangeness of my position, when there was a knock at the door at which we had entered. Uncle Tom did not move, nor did he when the rap was repeated impatiently. I was thinking he must be asleep, and of asking him if I should open the door, when it was opened from the outside, and a stately, handsome woman came into the room. I was sure it was Mrs. Barnaby, for I think no other person would have taken the liberty of coming into the room, and, as she stood there looking vexed at Uncle Tom's indifference, I remarked that she was dressed with neatness and taste, in black.

There was a marked difference between Mrs. Barnaby and Mrs. Tom. Mrs. Barnaby reminded me of a picture I had seen of justice, for, though her face was handsome, it was hard, and determined, and persistent. That night Mrs. Tom reminded me of a slight figure I had once seen clinging to a cross in a tableau, and which ascended upward out

of the angry waves below; whether this meant that Mrs. Tom would cling to her husband as to a cross, and find peace in that course, I did not know.

"Who is this boy?" Mrs. Barnaby asked, after looking coldly at me.

Uncle Tom remained motionless and silent, and, when Mrs. Barnaby made some impatient reference to our lack of politeness, I crouched down in my chair and was silent, too.

Although I am certain that she remained in the room two hours, she did not once sit down, and, although she talked a great deal, there were times when she did not speak for a painful length of time, and when there was such silence that the ticking of the clock was a relief. During these long silences I made the best of what I had heard to unravel the mystery which surrounded them, and came to the conclusion that she was a proud woman of social position and worth, who was piqued and angry because Uncle Tom neglected her. I believed that, while she did not think much

of Uncle Tom, she was humiliated to know that a woman of her worth should be so coldly treated by any one. I came to the conclusion, also, that she lived in the same house, occupying apartments on another floor, and that she frequently came in to talk to Uncle Tom of her wrongs.

At times she denounced him in the severest terms, and accused him of being fickle, capricious, unreasonable, foolish, and I don't remember what else. At other times she asked him questions, as wherein she had ever failed in her duty to him, or why he had utterly refused for years to recognize her existence. But, whether she asked him questions or denounced him, Uncle Tom was equally silent, and paid not the slightest attention to her being in the room.

She related in language burning with indignation how anxious he was to become her husband, and the promises he made, and then referred again to his treatment of her. Her principal complaint seemed to be that he

would not speak to her, and neglected and avoided her; all her charges seemed to be founded on his neglect. The people had almost forgotten her name, she said, because of his neglect, for everywhere she was known as Mrs. Barnaby; from this I imagined that her name was not Mrs. Barnaby at all. Several times she hit him so hard that I expected him to resent it, or make some explanation for my benefit, but, whatever was in his mind, he said nothing at all. It also occurred to me that it afforded her keen pleasure to hit him hard and at the same time justify herself, for after these strong thrusts she spoke more as a woman should, and after one attack, which was so keen that it made my heart ache for Uncle Tom, she did something toward putting the room in order; a womanly touch which made me think more of her than before. A dozen times she started to go, and opened the door; but what she said while holding the door open reminded her of something else, so she came back and went on in

the old way; a way which was pitiful, then fierce, but always womanly, I thought. I had heard only her side of the story, and it was not connected; but it had convinced me that, while she was ready to defend any step she had taken, Uncle Tom had always been stubborn, if not unjust, and that he had spent years and years in sullen silence, refusing to answer any of her questions, or explain his silence or neglect. Perhaps he had given his reasons a long time before; but if he had, they were apparently of so little force that Mrs. Barnaby refused to accept them, for she was always trying to show that they had no foundation.

When she came into the room she carried in her hand a package of papers, and late in the night these turned out to be letters Uncle Tom had written her before they were married. These she looked over and read extracts from. They did not sound like Uncle Tom's later letters, I thought, because they were written when he was younger, but he did not deny their authorship, or reply in any

way; indeed, there was no question that he had written them, for I remembered that he had quoted several of them at Fog Lake as coming from the ridiculous old Barnaby.

After reading an extract from the letters Mrs. Barnaby would ask why he had changed his opinion of her, and what she had done to deserve his cruel neglect. I did not doubt that Uncle Tom had written them, but I should have doubted had I heard them read and been told that he had written them to Mrs. Tom; there was a far-away sound to them, somehow, as though they had been copied out of a book rather than out of a heart. At last she went away, and after a half-hour of silence Uncle Tom arose from the lounge, shook himself as though he had been asleep, and gave me to understand that I was to occupy the bed in the back room. This I did, and he adjusted the pillows, and made it so comfortable that I thought gratefully of my friendly feeling toward him, after hearing how he was despised in another quarter.

The bed was so comfortable that I did not sleep well, and awakened frequently. Once I heard Uncle Tom walking up and down in the front room: at a still later hour I saw him seated at the big table in the middle room, writing, and there was such a harsh noise in his pen that I thought he must be answering the charges made against him that night. I awoke again, when I detected noises on the outside, indicating that day was near at hand, and supposed that Uncle Tom had gone to sleep without turning out the light; but while I was thinking about it I heard him resume his walk, and knew that he was still up.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD BARNABY.

THERE was one phase of Mrs. Barnaby's character which Uncle Tom seemed to understand: he believed that she had confidence in him, except in his neglect of her, therefore he was of the opinion that she would concern herself but little because of my presence in the house. Certainly she paid little enough attention to me during the first few weeks I was there, and, on coming out in the morning, if I met her in the hall, she either did not notice me, or spoke politely. On the first morning after I was there I found that Uncle Tom had gone away and left me, as I had slept very late, and as I went out at the front door, I met Mrs. Barnaby coming in from the street. In answer to her inquiries I told her my name, and explained that Mr.

Saulsbury was a friend of my father's, and was trying to find a place for me. This seemed to satisfy her, and I imagined from this that during their long estrangement Uncle Tom had conducted himself in such a manner as to win her confidence as far as his personal conduct was concerned, and that she marvelled at little he did except at his silence with her.

Although I was only at the house at night I learned by degrees, from observation, that the single servant kept by Mrs. Barnaby also looked after Uncle Tom's apartments, and that while Mrs. Barnaby ostensibly lived there, she was away a good deal among friends, but that the servant was always at home, and maintained a kitchen and dining-room on the first floor in the half basement under the room I occupied. Uncle Tom, I learned further, had not eaten in the house in years, taking his meals up town, and that Mrs. Barnaby was extremely irregular; but the servant always had two plates laid for them, and was as much annoyed when they did not appear

promptly, as though they had not failed her in months. I was stout and healthy, and as Uncle Tom usually went away in the morning without rousing me, I slept so late that the servant frequently found me in bed when she came to put the rooms in order. I thus became acquainted with her, and apologized for my laziness by saying that Mr. Saulsbury, who was a friend of my father's, had not yet found a place for me.

She said one morning that she would get breakfast for me, if I would be so kind as to accept of the favor, and as I supposed that Uncle Tom had made the suggestion, I accepted it, and after that I usually breakfasted there, though he had made an arrangement for me at a place where he often took his own meals. The servant, who was called Miss Help, was greatly pleased to find that there was some one in the house she could depend on, and waited on me with the greatest attention as I ravenously devoured her breakfasts, which were always good.

Miss Help had a notion that she was rather an unusual cook, and I think I encouraged this idea, for I was a marvellous eater. I once expressed the fear that the elaborate manner in which she provided for me would attract the attention of the head of the house, but Miss Help said no; the head of the house never noticed anything, and paid all bills presented without knowing or caring anything about them. Miss Help knew this, because she drew the money herself at the store, and the clerks knew her so well, and her master's notions concerning her, that when she presented a piece of paper saying, "I want twenty dollars — Miss Help," it was promptly paid by the cashier. The same cashier paid Mrs. Barnaby's drafts in the same manner, except that they were drawn on Barnaby & Co., and deposited in a bank where Mrs. B. kept an account. There was enough misunderstanding there, Miss Help said, but none of it concerned money matters. I did not imagine that Miss Help was extravagant,

except in calling out my poor appreciation, and there was something in Mrs. Barnaby averse to the idea that she threw her money away; but in any event, after being witness to what Uncle Tom had silently submitted to during my first night under his roof, I could not imagine him complaining of expenses, for his business seemed to earn him plenty of money; orders came every day almost as naturally as the morning itself. Still he gave it a great deal of attention. He always left me sleeping in the morning, and usually he worked awhile at the square table in the middle room at night. I formed an impression soon after going to the City that Uncle Tom's only recreation was in going to see Mrs. Tom, when he left everything behind, and became a different man.

Miss Help was a great admirer of Uncle Tom's, I found, but she always seemed ashamed to acknowledge it, as if she thought it a duty to stand by her sex. Although she was always trying to be strictly impartial, there

could be no mistaking who was her favorite of the two; I was only a young fellow, but it occurred to me that Miss Help, who was a very proper person, would have taken a stand for Uncle Tom had she not feared the world, for she had an idea that there might be wise head-shakings, and sighs, which would implicate her. This amused me very much, and I am afraid that I sometimes laughed at her in return for her kindness.

I usually spent several hours of every day at the store, and learned that Mrs. Barnaby was known by that name by all the employés; probably for the reason that the founder of the house had been a certain Mr. Barnaby. Uncle Tom was originally the company, but when old Mr. Barnaby died, and the business passed into Uncle Tom's hands as sole owner, he did not change the name of the firm. The employés knew that their employer's relations with his wife were not pleasant, so they formed a habit of referring to her as Mrs. Barnaby, which I thought they did with-

out any lack of respect. The cashier of the house was a certain Mr. Barnaby, a dignified gentleman of perhaps forty, and as Mrs. Barnaby transacted all her business with him, this may have been another reason why she had lost her own name. Mr. Barnaby was next to Uncle Tom at the store, and distantly related to the founder of the house. He was always very polite to me, and if I entered the place when Uncle Tom was out, he saw that my wishes, whatever they might be, were attended to. I believe that had any of the other employés annoyed me with their curiosity, or otherwise, Mr. Barnaby would have come promptly to my relief, and I therefore had great respect for him.

While at his business in the City Mr. Tom Saulsbury was as different as possible from Uncle Tom in Fog Lake. I always thought of him as old Barnaby while around the store, starting sometimes when I looked at him to find him so young, for I had had a venerable picture of old Barnaby in my

mind; but when we were in his rooms, or together on the streets, he became Uncle Tom again, except that the presence of Mrs. Tom was needed to complete the change. While about his business he took no interest in anything outside of his business affairs, being always attentive and polite, but never encouraging any one to talk of trifles; at Fog Lake he never talked of his business at all, except to abuse himself as old Barnaby, and nothing amused him so much as trifles. Those with whom he was associated had the greatest respect for him, and I am certain that none of them entertained dread or fear of him, accepting his grave way as being a superior way. None of them ever tried to find out who I was, and they only interested themselves in me because I was apparently a friend of Mr. Saulsbury.

One day Mr. Barnaby handed me a letter addressed in care of "Mr. Tom Saulsbury, with Barnaby & Co." It was from my mother; and although it expressed much sorrow and

concern because of my disappearance, I could not conquer the belief that she was really glad I had gone, since Number One had threatened to leave if I did not, so I did not answer it at once. I admit with humiliation now, that I wanted to worry them as much as possible, but my excuse then for not writing was that I might complicate Uncle Tom's matters by a lack of cunning. I still believed in him, and thought that if given time he would explain everything.

I am of the opinion now that Uncle Tom took me home with him hoping that Mrs. Barnaby would induce me to tell her all about Mrs. Tom, having tired of keeping the story; but I believed then that he had introduced me there because he had great confidence in me, and I was constantly on my guard. Indeed, I think my care was the cause of the suspicions Mrs. Barnaby finally came to entertain with reference to me. One day she asked me a few questions concerning my family history, with a view of being friendly, I think,

and I was so studied in my replies, and hesitated so much, that the circumstance must have set her to thinking, for after that she seemed to have some sort of a plan with reference to me. It was a system of cross-questioning, and as she was far more cunning than I was she soon had me hopelessly complicated. She frequently invited me to ride with her, and though I imagined that this was an act of politeness, I know now that she did it simply for the opportunity it gave her to question me.

One day, while seated alone in the carriage, Mrs. Barnaby having gone into a store, Bud Footit passed on the sidewalk. He was at first dazed at the luxury of my manner, and as his face was a mass of bruises I hoped Mrs. Barnaby would not see him, for a sight of him would only complicate matters. But he only stopped long enough to tell me that he had been attacked by superior numbers, in Howler alley, and when I reminded him that Uncle Tom had once said that in such an emergency the best thing was to back up against a wall, and

strike with great caution, he hurried away to act on the idea.

During the same drive I made a slip and spoke of Mr. Saulsbury as "Uncle Tom" in Mrs. Barnaby's presence, and she asked me why I did it. Feeling that I was in a fix I refused to answer at all, and she did not speak to me again during the drive. After that I refused to go with her, although she was more anxious than ever to question me, and this greatly increased her suspicions, I thought. All this made me very miserable, and I often thought seriously of running away again.

After I had been in the City two weeks or such a matter Uncle Tom went away one day, and I believed that he had gone to see Mrs. Tom, although I did not know it. That night I retired to his rooms, as usual, and had a notion to lock the door, fearing Mrs. Barnaby would call upon me; but while I was thinking it over she came in. After looking about, and seeing that I was alone, she commenced her questioning again, and was not

long in expressing the opinion that there was a secret between Uncle Tom and me, and that she would find it out. I thought my safest course lay in silence, so I refused to say anything at all, and would have been amused, but for my fright, to remember how very much like Uncle Tom I was acting. I am certain that she sat for an hour without speaking, when I believed she was thinking up a new plan of attack; and this frightened me so much I wonder I did not bolt out of the house. When she did speak, after a long silence, it was to ask a question more cunning than any she had ever asked me before, and I now understood why her visits to Uncle Tom were so distasteful to him. I had told her that one member of our family was an aunt, and this she never forgot. Was she young or old, or married or single, and a thousand other questions like it; and the more he talked about the aunt the more she seemed to hate her. She asked me if I would send a letter of her writing to my aunt. I did not reply, occupying

myself in remembering that when I had first met Mrs. Barnaby, I had told her I was from a place called Spirit Lake, a name by which our town had once been known. The name had disappeared from the maps, I knew, and so felt there was no danger of her making personal investigation.

She tried to coax me to agree to answer just one question, and when I would not agree, and she asked it anyway, I saw that to reply would have ruined everything; so I became more and more impressed with Mrs. Barnaby's cunning, and more and more afraid of her. I felt certain that everything would come out in a little while, she was so much interested, and I thought seriously of writing to Mrs. Tom to hide until I told her the danger was past, I so much dreaded a meeting between them.

When she finally went away, after sitting a long while without speaking, I thought she had made up her mind to come back during the night, and torture me into a confession; so I carefully locked all the doors before going to bed, and spent a wakeful night.

CHAPTER XV.

A LETTER FROM MRS. TOM.

It turned out that Uncle Tom had been to Fog Lake during his absence of three or four days, for while he did not say so himself, I received the following letter from Mrs. Tom the day after he reappeared in the store: —

"Your Uncle Tom came home on Friday, and acted so strangely during the two days he remained that I write you to inquire if you know of anything that has happened to him.

"'Have I offended you?' I asked him.

"'No,' he answered; 'I never thought so much of you in my life as I do now.'

"'Then why are you so changed?'

"'I have often taxed your patience,' he answered (he really never did tax my patience,

not even once), 'but let me tax it once more. I have often envied the spoilt boy who acted precisely as he felt when out of humor; let me, therefore, act as I feel for once in my life, and do as I want to, without restraint or question. Everything has gone wrong on the road, and nothing will help me so much as your agreement to let me act as I feel; nothing will do me so much good as to be with you, and act as I want to, without fear of questions or inferences. I am out of humor because you have done so much that has pleased me, and I have done so little to deserve it. Nothing can cure me so quickly as being with you; and if I appear reserved or cold toward you, we will say it is a plan I have adopted to punish myself. If I should want to walk out of the house in the middle of the night, and take the road again, for this once let me do it; I shall not feel offended if you do not attempt to persuade me from it, although I should ordinarily. If I should feel disposed to mope around all the time I

am at home, and say nothing, for this once let me do it, and do not question me, or draw unfavorable inferences from my odd conduct: after I have recovered you shall know all about it. I feel that I must carry out the strange humor I am in, and in your presence: nothing else will do me any good. I feel so wicked because of the bad business that until I recover I cannot trust myself anywhere but with you, and while I am with you I feel my wickedness so much that it seems like profanation for you to touch me. I don't know that you can understand this, but what I have said represents my odd humor, and if you will respect it, you will increase my admiration for you, and do what is for the best."

"When we went into our room, he lay down on the bed, and covered his face with his hands, and did not move for a long time: but he was not asleep, for once when I asked him if it would interfere with his humor should I stroke his hand, he shook his head, and said

no. I then asked him if I might hold his head in my lap, on a pillow, which always pleased him, and he answered that I might. So I got the pillow, and he went to sleep in this position, saying that he was tired, and wanted rest, and he did not waken until near twilight. He said he felt very much better when he awoke; he certainly was less moody, and asked me again to excuse what he called his humor.

"He excused himself from seeing members of the family whenever it was possible, and after we had retired to our room for the night he said it was another part of his humor that I should rest myself as he had done, and when he arranged the pillow, and I lay down in his arms, he talked to me in problems and riddles, and told me strange stories, always asking me what I would do under similar circumstances were he and I concerned. I am glad that my answers were always satisfactory, for he said they were, though he added that it did not matter, for the problems, and the riddles,

and the stories were only a part of his humor.

"Once I awoke, and he was still holding me in his arms. The room was perfectly dark, and when I asked if I was doing all I could to help him, he said yes, — I could do nothing more; he had a great deal to think about, and could get through with it better as he was. I asked if I might tell him, very quietly and in as few words as possible, how dear he was to me, and how much I wanted to serve him; and when he answered that I might, and I told what a good man I thought he was, a tear fell in my face; my husband was crying from wretchedness, though he tried to keep it from me. I can never tell you how I felt when I thought of this, and though I was anxious not to annoy him he realized that I was sobbing, and said — as gently as my mother might have done — that I was doing all I could do, and that I always did. But I fear that I have been remiss in my duty somehow; when I realized that our brave

Uncle Tom, our kind and merry Uncle Tom, was so unhappy that he was crying, I felt that the charm he always said I exercised over him was broken, and that there was no longer any reason why I should live.

"When the sun came up, he said he felt better, adding that since his humor had attacked him, he was afraid of the darkness; there were phantoms in it that provoked him so much that he wanted to fight them.

"He lounged in the room all of that day, sleeping in his chair occasionally, but saying little; and I hoped he was glad to have me near him, for he frequently said that he was tired and worried, but was rapidly becoming rested.

"That night he went away, his last words being that he hoped I could forgive the strangeness of his humor.

"If anything has happened I wish you would tell me. I have so much confidence in my husband that I am not worried, except on his account; I am certain that, whatever his

trouble is, it would not worry me. Perhaps if I knew what it was, and could tell him that I cared nothing for it, except that it annoyed him, he would feel better.

"Good-by, and be a good boy.

"Hurriedly,

"MRS. TOM."

I told him of the letter when we were alone together in his rooms, the night after his return, and he asked to see it. He read it over several times, but made no other reference to it than to say that the pilgrimage to say his prayers before his shrine had done him good.

Mrs. Barnaby came in while Uncle Tom was still thinking pleasantly of the letter, and soon began in the old strain. Uncle Tom was sitting in a chair, and he made no reply to anything Mrs. Barnaby said, although she said a good deal; but I thought there was something in his sullen way of looking at the floor, which indicated that he was becoming

impatient. He had received her attacks before with sullen indifference, but on this night he had a way of glancing about that convinced me that he felt like resenting her assaults on his honor and integrity.

Mrs. Barnaby had evidently concluded to cross-question Uncle Tom, probably being encouraged by her success with me; but she made poor headway, for he would not reply, although much that she said indicated that her conclusions were very near the truth. I do not believe she thought that Uncle Tom had married again, but she certainly thought that he was in love with my aunt; one of her statements was that his actions toward her indicated that he was infatuated with some one whom he was anxious to convince that he hated his wife.

Later in the evening he took his hat and went out, and did not return that night; and I thought this action was another indication that he was in a bad humor, and feared that if he remained he would defend

himself. Mrs. Barnaby soon followed him, without speaking to me, but she came back in a little while, and had a great deal to say concerning the indignity to which she was being subjected in her own house. In a fit of desperation I said that any wrong I might have done her was innocent, but I regretted saying it at once, for she almost laughed at having caught me. Her manner toward me was her manner toward Uncle Tom, in its subdued fierceness; and when I tried to remedy what I had said by remarking that I had never married her, she laughed a kind of hysterical laugh, expressive of contempt, and as she went out, she referred to me as a silly boy, and hurried to her room, where I could hear her walking about so rapidly and desperately that I was certain our affairs were about to reach a crisis.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAN'S GRIEVANCE.

THE next night when Mrs. Barnaby came into the room, and began in the old strain, Uncle Tom startled me by saying: —

"Why do you say I have never given you an explanation of my conduct? You must know that I have explained it a thousand times; always humiliating myself and taking the blame from you."

It was the first time he had ever spoken during her tauntings, and I believe that he did it to excuse himself to me, and through me to Mrs. Tom. Mrs. Barnaby was as much surprised as I was, I thought, for she made no reply.

"I do not say it to be impudent, or with any lack of respect," he continued, "but it would be monstrous for two people to live together

who hate each other as we do. Did you not cordially hate me you would not lash me as you do; and, while I never reply, I would not be human did I not hate you for the way in which you punish me. My worst enemy has never said half the bitter things of me that you have said, and yet you wonder why I act as I do."

I thought it was a satisfaction to Mrs. Barnaby that she had induced him to reply at last, for she did not attempt to defend herself; perhaps she believed, too, that in his excitement he would say something to throw more light on the subject in which she was most interested.

"There was a time," he continued, "when you never spoke to me of this matter that I did not attempt to explain my position, and although I did it with sincerity and respect, you did not believe a word I said, and questioned every statement the next time we met. You never caught me in a falsehood in your life, yet you believe me to be a liar. Can-

not you understand that it is impossible for me to love a woman who has such a monstrous opinion of me, and with so little reason? I could no more do it than I could cause my arm to grow longer by the exercise of will-power. You seldom fail to intimate that I am arranging to wrong you in a business way, and you frequently make inquiries that humiliate me. You never caught me in a dishonorable action, yet you believe me to be a dishonorable man. Many wives believe their husbands to be truthful and honorable when the world has every reason to doubt that they are; you accuse me of offences of which the world acquits me."

"Tom," she said, in a softened tone, which surprised me as much as her calling Uncle Tom by his first name, "I never did that."

"That is one of the unfortunate things between us," he replied. "Upon my honor you have done it many times. Many times I have cited instances, and you have acknowledged them, yet you now say, and I have no doubt

you believe, that you never did. It has been the misfortune of our lives; we never agreed on anything; we can't even agree to decently disagree.

"I dislike to dispute with you, but there is really no question that you know why I am not your husband; you must acknowledge this. There is now no more prospect of a reconciliation between us than there is prospect of winter in summer; there may have been a time when it was possible, but if you desired a reconciliation you gave me to understand that you did not; I mean that you did exactly what made a reconciliation impossible. No woman ever knew a man better than you knew me; had I confessed my personal weaknesses to you every day of my life you could not know me better than you do, but you did not use this knowledge in a way calculated to cause me to feel that I was in the wrong or to smooth my resentment. I told you what displeased me, and it was no more than I had a right to do, but you thought I

was so fond of lying that I misrepresented myself, and paid no attention, though I was not unreasonable; you could have as easily respected my wishes.

"There never was a trait in my character that I tried to hide that you did not discover against my will, and these you have harped upon until I dread to see you. Indeed, you harped upon these faults until I cured myself of them, but you never noticed that; you believe this moment that I have failings which I overcame in my early manhood. Of all the people in the world you are the most unjust to me; consequently of all the people in the world you are the one I will never love.

"I have tried so often to live respectably with you, that could you forget your prejudice against me, and realize the honest truth, you would honor me for sincere attempts to do right; but the more I tried, the greater the obstacles you placed in the way. I do not believe you did this mali-

ciously, but you had a theory concerning the best way to manage a husband, and it failed. Nothing will ever convince you that I have not avoided you because of a sullen caprice, and a desire to make you wretched; the honest truth is that it causes me as much remorse, regret, and unhappiness as it does you, but, since we can never agree, why give each other cause for more hatred? Every time you have attacked me, although I did not reply, I hated you more than ever after you had gone, and I know that my breaking my long silence now will have a similar effect on you. You have said so many displeasing things to me that you could not say a pleasing one now; should you attempt it, I should accuse you of deception.

"For two years, at intervals, you have taunted me with dishonesty and deception because of that divorce proceeding. I gave you my word of honor, in writing, that I did not attempt to deceive you; that I believed you received the notice, and did not

care to defend the action, and in addition to this you had absolute proof that what I said was true; but in the face of this solemn assurance, supported by the circumstance that you never knew me to be dishonorable before, you have accused me of perjury and false swearing a hundred times, and you have reviewed the matter with no other intent than to displease and disgrace me. Is this no reason why I avoid you? We should have been divorced, by all considerations of decency, and I did not attempt to take advantage of your property rights. Because we were once married, do you want the courts to declare that I must love you, although constantly giving me reason to hate you? You never speak to me that you do not express the belief that I am dishonorable, unjust, and unfair; cannot you understand that it is impossible for me to act otherwise than I do? You treat me like a thief, and expect me to act towards you as a lover.

"I know that among your acquaintances and

friends there are those who believe you to be in the wrong at times; I know it because they have said as much to me, but they have never said it to you, and they never will, for there is a gallantry due women which the world never forgets. This delicate charity you have mistaken for a vindication of everything you ever did; you will always believe that persons who are really my friends endorse everything you do. No man feels free to be rude to a woman unless the woman is his wife or sister, and I haven't a friend who would care to controvert anything you might say about me; but there never was a perfect woman, and you are not one; since you will believe nothing I say, it is unfortunate that some one has not pointed out errors in your course which you will one day acknowledge. You have often been heard to say that I am worse this year than last; I will admit that I am, but did any one ever hear you say as much of yourself? Yet you certainly are; you have attacked me oftener and with more severity.

I do not intend to be severe or unjust; I am only justifying myself, and explaining why you harm us both by your references to our unfortunate condition; it is bad enough as it is. Neither of us can afford to make it worse.

"You pleased me as a girl, but an hour before we were married you commenced your system, and I have been growing steadily worse ever since. I don't know now what your system is. I only know that I do not like it, and that it was the worst thing you could have done. But all this is in the past; then why remind me of the tender things I once said to you? They humiliate me, it is true, but they also make me wicked and hateful, and think less of you. Should you remind an old man of the beauty, and strength, and vigor of his youth, and taunt him because of his age and weakness, you would humiliate him, but by humiliating him you would not cause him to love you.

"You know as well as you know that you

are living that the divorce proceeding was inspired because of the certainty that we would never live together; you know that it was not my fault that you did not receive notice of it; you know I believed you had agreed to it, for there was no reason why you should not, and you have revived the matter simply to humiliate and disgrace me, for I have not attempted to take any advantage of your property rights, and you must know that I will never live with you. You ask what you have done to cause my dread of you; you have done everything you should not; you have tried to make me the fiend you have always believed me to be. Your ambition has been to send me to hell because I preferred heaven, and wanted to live as a decent man should."

Uncle Tom had worked himself into a sort of desperation, and tried to leave the room, certainly with a view of getting away and avoiding further talk in his bad frame of mind, but Mrs. Barnaby stepped in front of him, and barred the door.

"Who is this boy?" she said, pointing her trembling hand at me.

"Ask him; he will tell you," Uncle Tom replied.

"I have asked him, and in reply he has become confused and refused to speak further. There is a secret between you. What is it?

"His refusal to speak is not an instruction from me. I left him alone with you, knowing you would question him, for you were always suspicious of me. I made no request that he hide anything he might know of me. Is that not true?"

He turned toward me, and I nodded my head with as much earnestness as I could command.

"You may tell her all you know of me," he continued, in his strange, excited manner. "She believes me to be a scoundrel, but I am an honest man. Speak; answer her questions."

I believed this to be an act of bravado, and made up my mind to remain silent. But

Mrs. Barnaby was awed by Uncle Tom's strange excitement, and was silent too.

"I am not in the habit of telling you of my affairs," he said, after waiting a while, "because you have no interest in them, and because you believe that whatever I say is false; but to avoid your usual inquiries in other quarters, ask me any question you see fit, and I will answer; and I will convince you that my answers are true."

Mrs. Barnaby saw, as I did, that Uncle Tom was desperate; she realized, as I did, that there was nothing he would keep back, and hesitated before asking the question oftenest in her mind.

"Who is the member of this boy's family he refers to as Mrs. Tom?" she asked with difficulty, steadying herself against the mantel.

Without the slightest hesitancy Uncle Tom replied: —

"The dearest and best woman in the world; the woman I love as sincerely as I hate you;

the woman whose love repays me for all your hate: my honorable wife."

Mrs. Barnaby started at this announcement, but only a little, and walked steadily over to the door, as if she would leave the room. She stood facing the door for several minutes, trying to control herself, and when she turned upon us again there was an intense hatred in her eyes as well as tears, and shame, and humiliation.

"If I regard you in the future," she said, "with contempt, hate, and distrust, it is because you have deserved it, and confess it to me. I want to see this woman."

"You shall see her," he replied; "you and I are not in the habit of journeying together, but to-morrow morning at seven o'clock we will leave for Fog Lake. I want you to see a woman who is as enthusiastic over me as you are, but whose enthusiasm takes the form of admiration. Prepare yourself for the journey; a carriage will call for you at a quarter to seven."

I expected a scene, for they were both wrought up to an intense excitement, but Mrs. Barnaby turned to go at once, and paused with her face to the door.

"Nothing will satisfy you but a course that will humiliate and disgrace us all," he said, "and I will join you in it. For years I have urged peace, in spite of hate, but, since this does not suit you, we will make the affair everything you desire."

Mrs. Barnaby still stood close to the door with her back to us, and I thought from the manner in which she was clutching her hands together that she was making a strong effort to keep from crying; once I saw her quickly and impatiently wipe her eyes, but her agitation seemed beyond control, for, when it was evident that she could no longer hide it, she hastily left the room, and quickly went up the stairs to her own apartments.

Uncle Tom soon walked out of the house, and I followed, afraid to remain alone.

Arriving at the store, he admitted himself at

the door, and went to work at his desk, preparing instructions to Mr. Barnaby, made necessary because of his absence. It was after midnight, but when he asked me to go back to his rooms after something he had forgotten, I hurried away, although I dreaded to enter the door.

The light was burning as we had left it, and on going into the back room after the travelling-bag I had been requested to bring, I saw Mrs. Barnaby lying motionless on the bed. I hurried away, and found Uncle Tom writing rapidly and eagerly, as before.

I went to sleep in my chair and dreamed that I had married the witch of the Brooper Woods, and that she and her seven daughters were accusing me of unfaithfulness to them. All the phantoms that floated through my dreams were either fiercely angry or pitifully sorrowful, and all those I had ever known in my waking hours were present. When I was awakened by a rough hand, I thought the trouble so distinctly outlined in my dreams had commenced,

and that Uncle Tom was about to accuse me of being responsible for it all, for he was standing before me, and shaking me, and although he almost dragged me out at the door, I did not realize until we were in the carriage that the trouble had not yet really commenced, and that we were on the way to Fog Lake.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BROOPER WOODS.

Mrs. Barnaby was already at the station when we arrived there, walking nervously about the platform, and, although she had evidently been waiting for us, she pretended not to notice our arrival, and when we came through the arch of the building from the street, and sat down in the chair car of the train, Mrs. Barnaby soon after followed, seating herself on the side opposite to us, and I saw hard lines in her face which betokened an exciting journey.

Uncle Tom was impatient and reckless in his manner, too, and somehow I thought of the two as going away to find a quiet place to fight until one or the other was killed. This was suggested, no doubt, by my belief that Uncle Tom would become very vicious should

the slightest indignity be offered to Mrs. Tom, and when I thought of the time when we should arrive in Fog Lake I could not help trembling.

I went to sleep before the train left the station, because of the hard night I had just passed, and when I awoke we were hurrying through the country. Uncle Tom and Mrs. Barnaby occupied their former positions on opposite sides of the car, and were looking out of the windows; I watched them a long time in a lazy, indolent, sleepy sort of way, from my position behind them, and it seemed to me that I was accompanying two acquaintances on their way to an execution. When there was a sharp turn in the track over which we were travelling, I could see the engineer leaning out of the cab, and looking ahead, and I thought of him as the executioner, watching anxiously for the gibbet where he was to stop; and hurrying, to rid himself as soon as possible of his disagreeable duty. Uncle Tom and Mrs. Barnaby were so silent and gloomy, and

looked out so steadily, that I thought they were looking for the gibbet, too, and were anxious for the ceremony to be over.

When we stopped for dinner I noticed that Mrs. Barnaby secretly watched Uncle Tom, as though she feared he would try to escape her. He noticed it, too, and I thought of his statement that she never believed anything he told her, although he always told her the truth. He had proposed the journey, and there was nothing to indicate that he had any notion of deceiving Mrs. Barnaby; but she, nevertheless, followed his movements with the quiet scrutiny that an officer might give a prisoner in his charge, and this increased his impatience and bad humor.

After the sun went down, and the shadows began to collect in the valleys where the road ran, Mrs. Barnaby watched him more openly, and once followed him into another car, where he went to smoke. This annoyed him so much that I expected him to resent her action, and make a scene; but he did not, though he

afterwards seemed to take delight in arousing her suspicions, for several times he left the train when it stopped at the stations, and climbed on again at the last moment, Mrs. Barnaby all the time watching him with the closest scrutiny.

When we reached the little station within four miles of Fog Lake, where I had taken the train for the City, Uncle Tom stepped off on the platform, without any definite purpose, as I did, and Mrs. Barnaby's frantic haste in following caused him to walk briskly down the road into the Brooper Woods, in a fit of stubbornness and resentment.

For the first half mile he kept up a swinging pace which greatly tired Mrs. Barnaby, who walked along directly behind us, but he finally accommodated his pace to hers. The night was dark, and the road through the woods rough, and, after we had walked a mile or more, Mrs. Barnaby gave such evidences of exhaustion that we stopped to give her an opportunity to rest. She was constantly giving utterance to her indignation, which tired

her still further, and this she kept up when we stopped to rest. He was fickle, cruel, unfaithful, and dishonorable, she said; he was everything that he should not be; but Uncle Tom made no reply, occupying himself in chewing twigs gathered from the side of the road. Once when he was seated on a log beside the road, and his wife was standing before him upbraiding him in the old fashion, she accused him of thinking of murdering her, although he had really stopped to give her opportunity to rest, and I knew there was nothing on his mind except wonder as to how Mrs. Tom would receive them. I felt that he was going to her for guidance, accompanied by all in his life that was unpleasant, and I believe he felt that Mrs. Tom would say or do something that would comfort him.

There was a whispering among the upper branches of the great trees bordering the road, and I thought the trees were telling each other of the strange pair walking toward Fog Lake; but they were not long in suspense,

for Mrs. Barnaby was not silent a moment; at every step she upbraided her husband. He said very little, and did not attempt to explain his action in leaving the train, or the walk through the woods; but in answer to her statement that she believed he intended to murder her, he said that the thought was not in his mind, though it had occurred to him that if Mrs. Barnaby was his equal in strength he would like to fight her until one or the other was dead. Mrs. Barnaby laughed at this, calling him a coward, and saying that he would not think of it were she his physical equal, fearing the proposition would be accepted. In spite of this bitter speech, Uncle Tom made no further reply than to say he was anxious for Mrs. Barnaby to go to Fog Lake; he wanted her to see a woman; a woman a man could love and die for; a woman a man could love and not be ashamed of it.

Mrs. Barnaby made some contemptuous reply, intimating that Uncle Tom's love for Mrs. Tom was a thing to be laughed at, and that

he was not sincere; that he was never sincere in his life. Whenever we stopped to rest, Mrs. Barnaby insisted upon standing near him; whenever we walked on, she insisted upon walking beside him, and Uncle Tom was always cringing and trying to get away from her.

We finally came to where Joe Tack had his mill, and Uncle Tom and I sat down on a log beside the road to give Mrs. Barnaby another opportunity to rest; but she would not accept of the favor, continuing to upbraid her husband for his unfaithfulness and dishonor. When we sat down there was no light in the rude house where Joe lived, but while she was talking, one appeared at the window. When she turned and saw it, the thought seemed to enter her mind that we had stopped at that particular place because we were in front of the house where Mrs. Tom lived, and were afraid to go in, for she turned and walked rapidly toward the light, panting for breath as she went. I followed her

and saw the contemptuous and silent look with which she regarded Joe, who had evidently been writing a letter, for there was writing material on the table, and as he walked around in astonishment I saw there was ink on his hammer sores. Mrs. Barnaby was convinced by a single look around the house, which was a rude affair, that no woman lived there, and went out again, and while Joe was looking after her, something led my eyes to the writing material on the table. It was of the prize-package variety, and there was no doubt in my mind that when we came in he had been engaged in writing himself a spirit letter from his first wife. It was not a nice thing to do, but I looked at the writing, and saw that it began with "Dear Joe — When you gave Her a ——." I did not see any further, but I concluded that Joe had been giving his ugly wife another present.

The strange visitor interested Joe so much that he put the letter in his pocket, and

began looking for his hat, and I believed that he would follow; indeed, I think he slipped through the woods behind us, and heard much that was said.

When I returned to the road, Mrs. Barnaby was reviling the idea that Uncle Tom ever loved any one, or could love any one.

"I love her as much as I hate you," he answered rather roughly; "you ought to know how sincere I am in hating you. Her confidence in me is as great as your lack of it, and when you see her you will learn how good husbands are made; I have tried to deserve her love, as I have tried to deserve your hatred. She has always made me better; you have always made me worse. I never felt so much like a fiend in my life as I do this moment, because of your being in my company. When we come into her presence I want you to tell her everything that you believe or know to my discredit; I shall not say a word, but when you have concluded I shall ask her to come to me, if she does not

believe a word you have said. She will come to me, and be content with no other explanation; but because of her trust in me, I shall prove that everything stated by you is untrue. I shall convince her of it by proofs, that she may know that I deserve the confidence she reposes in me. Much as I want her to trust in me, I shall never permit her to believe that of me which is not true. You, the worst enemy I have in the world, know that I can disprove everything you ever said to my discredit; I have disproved it to you, but your hatred for me is so intense that you forget, and repeat charges which only cause me to dread your presence. You are responsible for the feeling which causes me to cross the road when you come near me; you have had but one ambition in life, since our marriage, and that was to cause me to hate you; you have succeeded so well that I wonder you are not generous enough to let me alone."

Uncle Tom arose from his seat, and started on again, taking off his hat to cool his head.

"The only proof you have ever given me that you are an honorable man," Mrs. Barnaby answered, crowding and stumbling after him, "is the fine speeches you make, and you hate me because I do not accept whatever you see fit to say to your credit, although I know what you say is not true. But you shall see that this pretty baby you have deceived will denounce you as I have done; she will punish you as you have punished me. She will avenge me!"

"I never boasted before in my life," Uncle Tom said, stepping out of the road when Mrs. B. came toward him, "and you know it, although you are thinking that I am telling a falsehood, but I boast now of the confidence Mrs. Tom has in me. And because she has confidence in me, I shall make her as happy as I have made you unhappy. She never inspired a feeling in me that was not good. You never inspired a thought in me

that was not disgraceful to my manhood, and you have had your reward; I swear that Mrs. Tom shall have hers. How do you account for it that the Tom Saulsbury whom you regard as a fiend is esteemed by others? Is not this evidence that your estimate of him is wrong?"

"No," she answered. "They do not know you as I do; you have deceived them."

This reply caused Uncle Tom to press on again, to avoid showing his gathering anger, and Mrs. Barnaby hastily followed, as though she feared he would soon bolt off into the woods.

"You are making this miserable journey with no other object in view than to wound me," he resumed, with more calmness, "for you know that I would sooner kill myself than even try to be agreeable with you; your whole life has been in the same strain so far as I am concerned, and your last hope is to ruin me, yet you have always been asking why I have ceased to respect you. If I should forgive you, it would be more unnatural than

that I dread you as I do; if I stood on the gallows, and a kind word to you would save me, I should not speak. I should prefer going into eternity feeling as I do, for it would not be against me anywhere that I could not respect a woman who has used all the talents God gave her to wound and hurt me. It should be the mission of a woman to shed tears over the faults of her husband when she can no longer avoid seeing them, and make him better, but because you have taunted me so much, I declare what you should have declared, and it is no more than the truth; I am an honorable man, and a man who believes in doing right, but you have exaggerated my faults until I wonder I am as good as I am. There is good in me, but you have refused to see it, and studied me only to find that which is bad, and taunt me with it. You regard me as a scoundrel because of an act as natural as though I had eaten when hungry, and given notice to the world that I had paid for my dinner. You wonder why I

lack respect for you, yet you know I could no more respect you than I could respect a man who had a temporary advantage of me, and whipped me without mercy."

Uncle Tom noticed that Mrs. Barnaby was crying, and that, as she put her hands to her eyes to wipe away her tears, she stumbled and almost fell. She said at once that she was not crying because anything he said was true; rather because she was cruelly wronged; but, in spite of this speech, he softened at once.

"I only tell you why I am lacking in respect for you because you have so often asked me," he said. "You need not answer me, but decide in your own mind if I am not for this once telling the truth. You have cruelly upbraided me a hundred times when I have remained silent; you have said more and meaner things to me than I ever said to you. Long ago I explained everything to you as kindly as I could, because I felt that I was so unjustly accused that I was entitled to an explanation; but you never talked to me in

the same spirit. You have refused to be as charitable with me as I have been with you. Because you do not please me, you regard me as dishonest, although you know I am respected by my other acquaintances. I have never accused you of anything save that you make me unhappy, but you accuse me of fickleness and dishonor. Is this not true?"

She made no answer further than to say that it was another of his fine speeches, and we walked along in silence until the outlines of the towns could be dimly seen.

There was no pause, but both walked briskly forward, as though both were confident of vindication and comfort at the hands of Mrs. Tom. Indeed, they walked more rapidly when Fog Lake could be seen in indistinct, uncertain outlines, like the ghost of a town, as though each one was anxious to get there first, and rudely awaken Mrs. Tom from her pleasant dreams of peace.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IDOL LEAVES THE SANCTUARY.

NOT a word was spoken as we walked rapidly through the town, and when we reached the house we ascended the stairs together, the outside door being open. Uncle Tom rapped loudly and confidently on the door, and the summons was answered, after a long delay, by the Boomer, who only showed his head.

"I want to see Mrs. Tom," Uncle Tom said simply, but there was that in his voice which convinced me that he believed that he would soon be vindicated; he acted like a man who regarded his cause so just that no fair person could doubt after hearing his explanation.

"And *I* want to see her," Mrs. Barnaby said, crowding forward. "I am this gentleman's

wife, and I want to see the person who divides the questionable honor with me."

The Boomer disappeared, muttering his surprise at seeing us, but leaving the door open, and we went into the front room, and sat down, after making a light. I saw by the clock then that it was two o'clock in the morning, and from various sounds about the house I knew the members of the family were getting up. My mother first appeared, and after greeting me somewhat awkwardly, she looked inquiringly at Uncle Tom, and then at Mrs. Barnaby.

"I want to see Mrs. Tom," he said again. "Will you be good enough to inform her that I am here?"

"Also be kind enough to inform her that I am here," Mrs. Barnaby said. "I am his wife; say to this person he refers to as Mrs. Tom, that Mr. Tom is a dishonorable man, and that I am here to prove it."

Uncle Tom looked at Mrs. Barnaby with the quick fierceness which distinguishes an

animal the instant before it springs; but he soon recovered himself, and did not speak. My mother left the room in the greatest agitation, and Number One soon came into the room, and sat down, imagining, I have no doubt, that there was an emergency, and that he was needed, though I think his first impression was that I had been brought home under arrest, and that it was his duty to go in and testify to my former bad character.

I saw Number Two at the half-open door, looking timidly at Mrs. Barnaby, and felt that Uncle Tom would invite him in, should he see him; but either he had lost his old politeness, or did not see Number Two, for he did not change his position.

There was a painfully long delay, during which I could hear my mother occasionally walking hurriedly about, and once I thought I heard a pitiful sob, when it occurred to me that Mrs. Tom had fainted on receipt of the news, and that my mother's hurrying had been after restoratives. At last my mother

came back into the room, and sat down, looking more uncomfortable than I had ever seen her before, and in answer to Uncle Tom's look of inquiry, she said, "She refuses to see you."

Uncle Tom gave a start which might have excited pity from Mrs. Barnaby, much as she hated him, but it did not, for she laughed in a loud, triumphant way, and said to him, in a voice so wicked that it surprised me: —

"Who was the better prophet? You said other people had confidence in you, and that I wronged you because I had none."

She spoke in a rapid, greedy, half-hysterical way, and acted as though she would go over to Uncle Tom, and make him look at the joy with which she greeted his humiliation; but she did not (it would have been dangerous, I think), though she continued to gloat over his downfall.

"You have always upbraided me because I did not accept your fine speeches without a doubt. I have investigated one of them, and

I find you were wrong. Even though you believed all you said in your favor, I am now certain that they had as little foundation as your boast that Mrs. Tom would believe nothing I said, but would have confidence in you in spite of my accusations."

The manner in which Uncle Tom bowed his head on the table was pitiful, and I believed he was struggling to keep from sobbing. He did not seem to hear anything that Mrs. Barnaby was saying; the refusal of Mrs. Tom to see him evidently occupied his mind, and it hurt him so much that his face wore the expression of a man about to be hanged, without a pitying face in the crowd. When he raised his face again, and turned toward my mother, he looked as though he had been whipped and beaten by superior numbers, and could not be revenged, though I noticed that the old fierce look came back for an instant when he saw the joy of Mrs. Barnaby.

"I wish you would say to Mrs. Tom once more," he said in a trembling voice, "that I am

in trouble, and wish to see her. I have something important to say, and she should hear it. It is of the greatest importance that I see her."

My mother went out again, followed by her father, and while we were waiting Number Two came softly into the room. Approaching Uncle Tom, he gently stroked the hand which was lying outstretched on the table, his face being buried in the other. Number Two seemed to have confidence in Uncle Tom, without question, as I had, and his action was so gentle that Uncle Tom looked up quickly, thinking it was Mrs. Tom; but at this moment my mother came in shaking her head.

"You have accused me of a lack of confidence in you," Mrs. Barnaby said triumphantly, as Uncle Tom crouched down in his chair, "and felt bitterly toward me because you were right when you were wrong. How you have abused me in your thoughts because I did not believe in you as Mrs. Tom did! How comforted you were to imagine that you

had found some one at last to call your blackbirds doves! Every theory you ever had concerning me, and they have all been unfavorable, was based on the idea that I was unjust because I was honest; that I was unwomanly because I had too much intelligence to believe in you when you did not deserve it.

"You wanted me to have the blind faith in you that you believed this injured girl had, and now that you know that she had none in you, perhaps you will be more charitable with me."

Mrs. Barnaby seemed anxious to convince Uncle Tom that she did not deserve the contempt with which he had always treated her. She reviewed their life as I had heard her do before, in the City, and although she claimed that she was always right, and Uncle Tom always wrong, there was a persuasive gentleness in her voice I had never noticed before. I thought she believed that in his humiliation he would acknowledge everything she said, and become her willing slave in

future. I almost believed this, too, he seemed so changed; and as she talked, softening more and more, I watched the door, for I thought that Mrs. Tom might change her mind, and come into the room. But Uncle Tom evidently did not hear anything Mrs. Barnaby was saying: he was thinking of his broken idol, and of his future without it, for finally he said: —

"If I will agree to leave the City, and everything I have there, will you be satisfied? You may be sure I will never come back here."

There was as much bitterness in his voice when he said he would never come back to Fog Lake as I had noticed when hearing him express his hatred of Mrs. Barnaby; so much, indeed, that I was glad Mrs. Tom had not heard it, and could never be told of it; there was something in it that no one could describe.

Mrs. Barnaby was surprised at the cold, indifferent manner in which he said this, as if

she had been expecting a different answer, and she could only murmur that she did not want him to leave the City, or his interests there; that she wanted nothing of him that was not fair.

"But I intend to leave the City, whether it pleases you or not. Will that satisfy you?"

Her old spirit returned because of his sullen indifference to her apparent fairness, and she answered yes, she would be satisfied.

Writing materials were at once procured at his suggestion, and Uncle Tom hurriedly wrote a few lines, and signed his name to them. After Mrs. Barnaby had examined the writing, and approved it, she asked two of the others to sign it as witnesses, which they did, and, as she placed the paper in her pocket, Uncle Tom arose unsteadily from his chair, and walked out of the room; after saying to my mother that she felt more kindly toward Mrs. Tom because of her honorable course, Mrs. Barnaby came down the stairs, and walked a few paces behind us, for I had accompanied

him. On our way to the depot, for a train was due within an hour, Uncle Tom explained that he desired that I accompany Mrs. Barnaby back to the City, and that he would pay my expenses.

Arriving at the depot, which was dark, we walked around on the platform, Mrs. Barnaby in one way and Uncle Tom in another. Not a word was spoken until the agent arrived, and made a light, and when this was done, Uncle Tom purchased two tickets for the City, which he gave to me. He also gave me a sum of money to pay for my return, and other expenses, and I noticed that when this was done there was little left in his purse.

Soon after, the train came in, and Uncle Tom and I went into one of the cars. Mrs. Barnaby followed, and it was not long before Fog Lake was left behind.

Uncle Tom soon went forward into the smoking-car, and when I went to look for him he was gone. An intense loneliness came over me when I realized that he had left me

without even saying good-by, and I tried to remember the places where we had stopped. One was at a water-tank in the woods, and I believe he had left the train there, and walked out into the darkness; anywhere to be rid of Mrs. Barnaby and a relative of Mrs. Tom's.

In returning from my search through the train I passed Mrs. Barnaby, and when she spoke to me I told her that Uncle Tom had left the train at a lonely water-station in the Brooper Woods, where there was not even a house.

She did not reply, but looked out of the window so long that I went back to an empty seat, and sat down to think of Uncle Tom stumbling along through the woods, cursing Mrs. Barnaby and everything in the world except Mrs. Tom. Somehow I believed that he could not curse her, and I had a picture in my mind of Uncle Tom stumbling into a brook in his mad run through the woods, and of his climbing out to sit on the bank, and bathe his swollen eyes.

After a while a train-man touched my arm, and said the lady forward wished to see me. I went over to where she was, and sat down by Mrs. Barnaby's side.

"Are you fond of your Uncle Tom?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered, at once.

This did not seem to surprise her, though she thought about it awhile.

"I believe I should like him, were he not my husband, though he is the most stubborn man that ever lived. You heard him say to-night that he would never go back to Fog Lake, and you may not have believed it, but he never will. If Mrs. Tom should hunt him out, and ask him on her knees to forgive her, he would refuse to even speak to her. Much as he has wronged me, I will be revenged, for he will always wildly love Mrs. Tom, though he will never forgive her. If she should find him, in spite of his hiding, every day of her life, and ask him to forget, he would no more do it than he

would love me. There never was such a stubborn man; I believe he will love Mrs. Tom to his dying day, but I am certain that if she should appear at his death-bed, he would refuse to look at her. No one knows so well as I do how stubborn he is; Mrs. Tom may have known more of his inner nature than I ever did, but she has never had occasion to know of his stubbornness, though she will now have opportunity to find out."

When she looked out of the window again, I would have given a great deal to have known what was in her mind, and to have known that she felt something of tenderness for Uncle Tom, for I could not think of his humiliation because of Mrs. Tom's refusal to see him without a moist feeling in my eyes; he had been so fond of her, and he had been so bold in going with Mrs. Barnaby to see her, that I thought she had made a mistake in refusing to see him. A man as bold and defiant as he was in front of Mrs.

Tom's home must have had a good defence, and as I thought of him in the woods that night, bruising himself as he staggered on, I believed his boldness had left him, and that he was lying flat on his face in the underbrush, where he had stumbled and fallen, and that he was sobbing out his grief where no one could hear, oblivious of all his bleeding wounds save the fearful rent in his heart.

"Had he loved me as he did Mrs. Tom," Mrs. Barnaby said again, "I don't believe I should have given him up so easily. Of course it was right that she should, but a man who hated as he did must have loved intensely; it seems to me now in my loneliness, and in the recollection of all my unhappiness because of neglect, that his strong love for Mrs. Tom, and his blind confidence, would have been wonderfully agreeable. I never had it; I never could have had it, for it was not in me to inspire it; but if I ever hated him, it was because he stubbornly refused to love me as I know he did Mrs. Tom. If I

ever meet him again I shall say that, had he made me his shrine, he should have had a better return for it, and I should not say it to taunt him. If I could see him now, I would say I am sorry; I have lost something I never had, but he has lost that which he greatly enjoyed, because of his certainty that he possessed it, and to do without it will make him as wretched as the damned."

Day was breaking, and driving the phantoms out of the woods, but in my mind there was one that would not be driven out: a man without a hat, and with dishevelled hair and torn clothing, stumbling and falling over stones and prostrate trees; a man with bruises on his face, and lacerated limbs, trying to get away; anywhere, to be rid of all there was in his life worth remembering; a strong man trembling with weakness and fright, because his idol had said to him, "Begone!" when he had expected strength and comfort.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RETURN TO FOG LAKE.

I RETURNED to Fog Lake the third day after my departure, having left Mrs. Barnaby at her own door in the City, where she bowed stiffly, and retired without inviting me in. Her old spirit of resentment had returned during the latter part of the journey, and she said but little to me, and none of it concerned Uncle Tom.

It happened that I arrived on the evening train, and came upon them at home after the lamp had been lighted, and they were all seated together in the front room. My eyes at first sought Mrs. Tom, who was seated on a low stool engaged with some sort of work, and trying to bear up bravely, though she was succeeding but poorly. Mrs. Tom had been quite ill, I learned, and unable to leave her

room for two days, but that morning she had come downstairs, determined to make the best of it, as they all advised her to do. I knew at a glance that she regretted not seeing her husband when he asked for her, and that she thought as much of him as she ever did; unhappily, there was no mistaking this, and I felt that there could be no more content in that house so long as Mrs. Tom looked as helplessly mournful as she did.

Evidently the others had agreed not to refer to the subject, for Joe Tack and his wife were present, and they were talking of their affairs when I came in, and the conversation concerning the Tacks was resumed as soon as I had seated myself. I expected them to make inquiries about the other parties concerned in the only sensation Fog Lake had ever known; but they did not, and acted as though as little as possible should be said on the subject, for I think they all believed in Mrs. Barnaby. Indeed, they were talking of general matters with a view of diverting Mrs. Tom's mind

from her sorrow; as though she could forget her husband in hearing of Mrs. Joe Tack.

Mrs. Tack had greatly increased in ugliness since I had last seen her, and Mr. Tack's devotion had become more noticeable, too, for he had one arm around her, and held in his other hand the letter I had seen on his table at the house in the woods, and which he had undoubtedly written himself. Knowing this as I did, I wondered at his impatience because more attention was not given it, for when anything else was mentioned he looked as though he could not understand why a spirit letter did not cause those present to tremble, and keep close together.

From the conversation that annoyed him I judged that Mrs. Footit had just gone away, and that she had given the Boomer to understand that he must take back the bonds he had sold Footit, and return the money. The Boomer was of the opinion that in a civilized country a trade was a trade, and my mother thought so, too, and they all seemed to think

that Mrs. Footit had acted in an outrageous manner, from which I imagined that in her conversation with the Boomer she had left the bark on her words. She was always threatening to give people the word with the bark on, and it seemed that the Boomer had been caught at last, for he had forgotten his schemes and was quite nervous. I had often been at home when Mrs. Footit came stalking in looking for the Boomer, to demand that he take back the bonds in the violin factory he had sold her husband, and I was always so much interested that I could not help wondering what had happened when she finally caught him.

But I was full of the Uncle Tom episode, and when I tired of their talk, and intimated a desire to see Mrs. Tom alone, I was told by Number One, who seemed to be managing the affair, that the name of Thos. Saulsbury had been forgotten in that house, for the reason that to mention it only distressed his innocent victim. Number Two had been wanting to ask

all the evening about Uncle Tom, and this remark from his enemy caused him to bristle up.

"I haven't forgotten him," he said. "I think he was in the right. He was my friend, and I stand by him. His name has not been forgotten in this house; it was Tom Saulsbury of the Sixty-fourth. I remember it; I shall always remember it."

Number Two was greatly excited, but Number One paid not the slightest attention to him; indeed, he soon afterwards said that the silence of all those present convinced him that the name of a man we had once known and esteemed had been forgotten, because he had been condemned for a grave offence.

This remarkable piece of impudence caused Number Two to become so excited that he took a chew of tobacco in the presence of all of them, — a thing he had never dared to do before, — and I believe this circumstance prevented a fight, for, as he was afraid to spit in the house, he was compelled to go outside for that purpose, where he cooled off. I was

as angry as Number Two, I think; so I went to my room in a bad humor, and forgot the matter myself until I was awakened in the night by Mrs. Tom, who had crept into my room to secretly talk of our friend.

I was anxious to comfort her; so I told her how certain I was that Uncle Tom was in the right, and dwelt on the things he had said which indicated that he was desperately fond of her. I related how he had proposed to bring Mrs. Barnaby to Fog Lake, as a man might do who was in the right; how he had told Mrs. Barnaby of the woman he loved, and much more in the same strain; but it was unfortunate that I did, for it distressed Mrs. Tom so much that she sobbed quite pitifully for a long time.

During the time they had lived together Uncle Tom had given Mrs. Tom considerable amounts of money every time he came home, which he said represented his savings, and which he wanted her to "keep" for him. This money had been invested at a good rate

of interest, and Mrs. Tom thought of her fortune only to imagine that her husband was wandering around in destitute circumstances, and in need of aid, for I had told her of his light purse after buying the tickets, and of his disappearance soon after the train started. I knew that he would have no trouble in providing for himself, wherever he went; but Mrs. Tom was not so confident, and worried a great deal over the thought that Uncle Tom might need some of the money he had given her with such a liberal hand. I think the amount was four or five thousand dollars, and it seemed a great fortune to Mrs. Tom, who also mentioned that Uncle Tom had said he had never been able to save money until he was married. Then I told her of the great house of which he had been the head, and how certain I was that the trouble arose because of a complication in his divorce proceedings with Mrs. Barnaby; but it all distressed her so much that I finally refused to say any more, as I had done with Mrs.

Barnaby, though for a different reason, and she finally went away, first saying that if she could get down on her knees before Uncle Tom, and tell him why she did not see him when he asked for her, she would be better satisfied. Her explanation to me of her failure to see him was hurried and unsatisfactory, but I gathered in a general way that she had been so stupefied on hearing of his trouble that she could not move, and, while expecting him to come to her, she was told that he was gone.

There was a certain timidity about her grief which affected me strangely. She took all the blame on herself, and never once intimated that Uncle Tom was in any way in the wrong; he had done nothing that was unusual or out of the way, and she had acted in a fashion that was monstrous, considering all his kindness to her. This was her way of talking about it, and it made me think that it would immensely please Uncle Tom, and of his say-

ing once that when any one had confidence in him, he always tried to deserve it.

. . . . . .

I think there was general regret at home because I had returned, for, since we never heard from him, I talked to Mrs. Tom of her husband in spite of their commands, and I thought it would soon be necessary for me to run away again. I felt myself that I was only doing Mrs. Tom harm by talking of her husband, and when I was with her I excused my conduct by thinking that I would not be there long, and that she really ought to know the truth in a case in which she was so much interested, and have something pleasant to think of while I was away.

We walked a great deal along the wooded road Uncle Tom and I had travelled with Mrs. Barnaby on the fatal night, usually after nightfall, for Mrs. Tom seemed to imagine that her husband was in hiding in the woods, or that, if he had made way with himself, his ghost was still walking the road, defending

himself from an imaginary Mrs. Barnaby, and cringing from her; I thought it possible myself that even his ghost would dread the living Mrs. Barnaby. I think she would have gone alone had I not cared to become her escort, for she seemed only to desire my presence to point out the places where Uncle Tom had waited while Mrs. Barnaby rested, and to relate what he had said.

She was quite certain for a time after his disappearance that Uncle Tom was dead, having made way with himself as a result of her cruel humiliation of him, and once she told me that she walked the road in the hope of meeting his ghost. She believed that it would walk through the woods, and she hoped to tell the phantom what she regretted she did not tell Uncle Tom; that she loved him, and trusted him, and could not live without him. At other times she thought it possible she might meet him in his own proper person; that he would come back to the woods at

night on his way to Fog Lake, and she hoped to meet him and tell him her story.

I remembered the very spot where Uncle Tom had said that when Mrs. Barnaby saw Mrs. Tom, she would see a woman a man could love; a woman who would make a bad man good by believing in him, and I pointed this out. Uncle Tom had stood there, leaning against a tree; Mrs. Barnaby, here, refusing to rest, but tiring herself out in declaring to me, as I stood in the road, just where I did then, that Uncle Tom was unscrupulous; that he would find out that no one would trust him, and that he would see when they reached the house. I told her with what contemptuous silence Uncle Tom had received this reflection on Mrs. Tom, and how he moved on, and how Mrs. Barnaby had followed, declaring that his baby-faced wife should know the truth, and that she would turn from him in loathing; she knew it — he would see for himself.

Then I told how Uncle Tom had boasted of Mrs. Tom's confidence in him; he had

never boasted before, but he did then, and said that Mrs. Tom would come to him, in spite of all that Mrs. Barnaby might say, and that because of her confidence in him he would convince her with actual proofs that all Mrs. Barnaby said was untrue; and much more of the same nature I repeated, until Mrs. Tom imploringly begged me to stop.

"I can only remember one thing he ever said," Mrs. Tom moaned, "that I am inclined to doubt: that love never kills. I think it will in my case. Don't tell me any more to-night."

Our walks frequently led us into the heart of the woods, and when Mrs. Tom heard a noise, she would stop, and listen, and call out, "Tom, Tom, Tom," with long stops between the words, bursting into sobs with the last word on her lips. This once caused me to think that it would be better for her could she feel resentment, but when I told her of it she said that her husband had always been so thoughtful and kind that she could not feel

harshly toward him; she was certain that he did not deserve reproach, and, even if he did, she could not upbraid him when she thought of his sorrowful wanderings; a homeless outcast, yet she knew so well that he was a good man, and a tender man.

She called "Tom, Tom, Tom," so often in the woods, and always so pitifully, that I came to think that the winds would take up the words, and carry them away; perhaps in their wanderings they would find him, and I was sure he could not resist the appeal, for I had never heard anything more touching.

When we returned home one night, after a walk in the woods, we learned that Number Two had gone on another bender, and was making a tremendous noise in his room in the attic. The Boomer was away from home, as was usual with him, and when it was suggested that I speak to the old gentleman, and try to pacify him, I walked up to his door, and knocked; but he paid no attention, further than to say that he was practising with

his musket, and that the figure on the door, at which he intended to shoot, represented a certain Devil and Copperhead. I retired rather hurriedly, for I was standing behind the door; but as there was no shooting, I returned after a time and listened.

Number Two was telling his comrades that Tom Saulsbury, late of the Sixty-fourth Regiment, and as good a fellow as ever lived, had been chased away by the Rebel-Copperhead-Devil, and that if they were true comrades they would resent the insult. Number Two talked quite prettily for a while of Uncle Tom and his wife, who had always been so good to him; but his fierceness soon returned, and I saw by looking through the keyhole that he had on the little cap with the brass letter and figure in front, and his blue coat, which had stripes on the sleeves; that he was on his feet, with his knapsack on his back, his canteen hanging at his side, and his musket on his shoulder, as soldiers carry them while on duty; in short, he was ready to

march on the enemy. Indeed, while I was looking he commenced moving his feet to get the step, and finally marched directly toward the door, which caused me to retreat in disorder. But just as he reached the door he gave a sharp command, and marched the other way in such haste that his cap fell off. I heard him expostulating with Captain Waterbury afterwards for giving the command to retreat, and grandfather quite gravely said that while there was something in caution, there was a good deal more in prompt attack.

Although we hoped that the noisy town omnibus would rattle up to the door during the night, and that grandfather would return from his reunion, nothing of the kind occurred, and we knew the exercises would continue the next day.

CHAPTER XX.

A MESSAGE AND A MYSTERY.

I HAVE said we never heard from Uncle Tom; we never did, but there came to the house one day a letter that was unquestionably written by him. There was no date of any kind, and the postmark could not be made out, either as to the town or State from which it came, and the letter was not addressed to any one; it might have been a message from the grave, intended for the world.

The envelope was directed to me, and the letter ran as follows: —

"If a little red man should come up through the table on which I write, and say that he would grant me any single wish, I should ask for the Mrs. Tom I have lost; it seems to me that I have no ill that a sight of her would

not cure. She has disappeared out of the world completely, and I think she must be in heaven; if I ever dreamed of heaven at all, it was of finding some one there who was as pretty, as patient, and as trusting as was the sweetheart I have lost. She was the dearest woman in the world; but I cannot find her, and I am sure that I shall never see her again.

"Although I do not know where she is, I remember perfectly her pretty face, her gentle voice, and her soft touch, and I feel that she is not living any more, because I believe I could not be as wretched as I am were she alive. While I would attempt any journey to find her, and think nothing of the dusty way I might be compelled to travel (for I should feel amply repaid for any toil with a single smile from her face), I make no journeys or searches, I am so confident that she has forever disappeared. She is lost, never to be found.

"No one but me knows the pretty things

she has said to me, and I should almost be content with her memory had I not dreamed once that she recanted, in one act, all the pretty things she had said to my credit, and which pleased me so much. But I hope that the woman in the dream did not represent my old love, my only love, and that my sweetheart was lost before she discovered that she could not believe in me, or trust me.

"I write this in the hope that she may somehow be able to see it, as her old self, and know that I am grateful for many sweet favors in the past. I cast this writing into the sea; she may in some mysterious way be able to read it, and know how dear she was to me, and that I do not believe the woman in the dream was the love I prized so much. I want the old love to know of my confidence in her, and that I feel that though her figure should appear in life, in its old form, to humiliate me, I should believe that a wicked spirit had taken her form and figure to taunt me. The dream has made such an impression

on me, and I was so humiliated when the figure said that none of the pretty things I had been so fond of were sincere, that I am certain the Mrs. Tom I once knew is lost, and that I shall never see her again.

"I have always had a horror of the dead, but if I knew where Mrs. Tom was buried, I should often visit her grave; to be near the clay of such a woman as she was would comfort me in my present loneliness. I think that if I should walk through an unknown field of graves, in which she was buried, hers would attract me, and dispel the gloom of the place; in losing her I lost everything, and I should find comfort in hovering around the ruins of my former greatness."

The letter was often discussed in the family, and the circumstance remarked, to the discredit of Uncle Tom, that he attempted no defence. This was regarded as the most serious of all, although it never occurred to Mrs. Tom, who continued to reproach herself, and imagine that her husband was wandering

up and down the world, destitute and wretched.

Joe Tack had lately had political hopes, connected with the Legislature, and in travelling around the country to exhibit himself as the best husband in the world, I knew that he talked a great deal about Uncle Tom, and that his criticisms were always unfriendly; perhaps he was jealous because Uncle Tom had been a good husband, too, for I often heard that he quoted Uncle Tom as an example of the injustice men practised upon women.

The Boomer had a scheme in the Legislature, contemplating the appropriation of a million dollars by the State to build a University at Fog Lake, and he was Joe Tack's principal patron, and between them they were making a vigorous canvass. Joe confessed everywhere that he was not a statesman, but he expressed the opinion that he was the best husband in the world, and said that in a country full of bad husbands he

ought to succeed. The people quietly laughed at this, and led the candidate to believe that his issue was a good one. So far as I was personally concerned I felt no resentment toward Joe; a man who had a wife as ugly as Mrs. Tack was punished enough.

Mrs. Tack frequently accompanied her husband, in order that the people might realize what a sacrifice Mr. Tack was making in being a good husband, and she was unfriendly; so that those who knew of the matter at all believed that Uncle Tom was a wicked man, in spite of my judgment (and I knew more of the matter than any of the others) that, had he been given an opportunity, he would have vindicated himself.

The Boomer travelled around a good deal, too, but he was so much interested in his booms that he had little to say of the matter which interested us most; while his schemes were always turning out badly, he never lost confidence in them, but was as

faithful to them as if they had fulfilled every expectation, and had time to think of nothing else. He therefore left Uncle Tom alone, if he did not say anything in his favor, and I used to hope that we might get rid of Joe Tack by his returning to the mill long enough to make a fire in the boiler; but I learned that there was little hope of this, for his boiler had become so old and rusty that even he was afraid to trust it, and I think this was the reason that he went into politics, with his ugly wife as an issue.

The Brooper Woods continued to attract Mrs. Tom, and as often as possible she walked there, and I always faithfully attended her, frequently forgetting myself, and adding to her trouble by recounting what I knew to Uncle Tom's credit.

On a certain evening, a month after his disappearance, we had gone to the lonely water-tank where Uncle Tom had left the train, and the poor woman looked everywhere for his footprints, hoping to discover the course

he had taken in leaving the country; but nothing could be found in the darkness, and she at last walked wearily toward the thickest part of the woods, and the road he had travelled with Mrs. Barnaby, believing that he had gone that way. She still imagined that he was in hiding in the woods, living as an unhappy hermit, and that, if he should hear her calling his name, he would come to her. I believed that, too, for the manner in which she called "Tom, Tom, Tom," the last word always being mingled with a sob, would have moved the most stubborn heart.

In walking towards the thickest part of the woods from the water station we followed the course of a noisy brook, which led us toward home, though not in a direct line, and I imagined that the water had learned Mrs. Tom's refrain, and was calling "Tom, Tom, Tom," for I could hear it in the rush and roar. I mentioned this to her, and it pleased her, for she said that, if her husband was living in the woods, he must

sometimes come to the brook to drink, and then he would hear what I had heard, and know, as I knew, that she was dying without him, and that life would be a joy to her should he consent to come back again.

Mrs. Tom was particularly nervous that night, and called the name of her husband oftener than usual, though there was nothing to encourage the belief that he was within hearing, for the Brooper Woods were as quiet as a tomb. There was a pathetic sorrow in her voice that I had never heard before, and I felt it would have been better could she have felt some of the hate of Mrs. Barnaby.

At her request I was half a hundred yards in advance on our return home, as she said he would be more apt to come when she was alone, and as she had stopped in the road to call in the old way, I sat down to wait for her, and was thinking how horrible it would be if the poor woman should lose her mind, and forever call "Tom! Tom! Tom!" and make every one cry who came near her. I was thinking of

going back, and leading her home, when she gave a quick exclamation of surprise; there was also something in her voice that convinced me that she was not frightened, and when I hastened toward her I knew that what she had expected had happened, and that Uncle Tom's ghost or own proper self had stepped out of the darkness and into her arms. I could not see distinctly, but I felt that she was on her knees before him, trying to speak, but could not for sobbing. Uncle Tom picked her up at once, and held her in his arms until she had partially recovered. Then she attempted to explain why she had not seen him; but he asked her not to speak of that.

"I have tried hard to be brave and sensible," he said, "but I could not resist coming back to Fog Lake to-night, in the hope of seeing you as you were before our trouble came; as you were when a touch of your hand rested me when I was tired. I am so tired now that I am like a silly boy, and want some one to comfort me; no one in the world can do it

except the old love I have lost, your old self, whom I found wandering here in the woods.

"If I ever had the power of reasoning, I have lost it, for I came back to-night with the hope in my heart that I should find I had dreamed all my unhappiness; that the sight of you would drive away all the devils that have been keeping me company. Although I knew so well that my unhappiness was real, I could not forget the power for good you once had over me, and I came back hoping you would somehow find means to help me, as you used to do; it was foolish, but I could not help it. But as I walked along, I heard you calling me, expressing helplessness in every word; my idol had left the sanctuary where it so long dispensed comfort and aid to others, and was seeking comfort. I knew then that there was no hope; there was rain, and cold, and sorrow in heaven, and the angels were leaving it.

"Don't speak of anything that will cause me pain; let me go my weary way, feeling that

the old love has come back for a moment from the darkness, from the skies, and will go away again. Don't speak of anything that has happened in a month; let me think of you as one at whose grave I have mourned, and who is permitted to help me forget my loss by appearing to me as she was before. Let me believe in you again, for I lived on your faith in me. I need the old encouragement to keep my reason."

As had always been her way, she accepted what he suggested without hesitation, and gave herself up to saying that she knew he would come back to her, and that she walked in the woods whenever it was possible, and called his name.

"For a month I have been longing for you as a man in hell longs for water," Uncle Tom continued. "The fire that is now consuming me I built for the mere pleasure of seeing the blaze, although I knew better, and was always warning myself against it. In spite of my scars I played with the fire, and now there

is not enough water in the ocean to put it out. I am like the wretched man who experiments with opium, and who drags himself back to his old vice. I am more unhappy now because of you than I ever was content, but I find a pleasure in being with you. I am a man without honor, for they would not listen to me when I would have shown that I was honorable, though the worst criminals are always given a hearing. I am a man without a home, and a man without a heart, for I have given both away, and cannot take them back, and I am so wretched in consequence that I must find relief as the unhappy drunkard seeks forgetfulness of his disgrace in drink, although he knows the world hates him because of the habit that affords him relief. Let me revel for a brief time in your company; forget our trouble, and tell me that you love me, and have confidence in me."

"I love you; I have confidence in you," she answered quickly. "If I knew that I was dying, and had but a few words to say, they

would be 'I love you; I have confidence in you.'"

"It is the draught that intoxicates," he replied. "Poor drunkard that I am, let me forget my sorrow in dissipation; pass the cup again, and say that you would die for me."

"As willingly, Tom, as I rest in your arms," she answered; "and you can never know what a blessed joy it is to see you again. Let me say my prayers to you, my god, and declare it."

"I am still a fool," Uncle Tom said, after a pause, during which he prevented her getting on her knees before him, "and this pleases me, as the drunken fellow who is not a man is pleased when he is called a god. But I must get away before I recover from my intoxication. Old Barnaby, whom I now somehow think of as the devil, expects me to take the road again, and travel for him. Say once more that you love me, and have confidence in me, and I'll be off."

Mrs. Tom did not realize before that he

was only there for a moment, although I had felt it from the first, and she clung to him with all her strength.

"Don't go," she sobbed. "Don't hide from me again, Tom; I am becoming so weak that I cannot hunt you, and will die. Don't go, Tom; I cannot live without you; oh!"

He had broken away from her, and disappeared into the woods, and when I hurried to her I saw her stagger and fall into the underbrush beside the road. When I picked her up the thorns had caught in her hair, and pulled it down around her face, and she was limp and faint.

Determined to get her home as soon as possible, I picked her up and started; but it was a heavy load, and when I staggered I felt her lifted out of my arms, and knew that Uncle Tom was carrying her rapidly along in his strong arms. I followed, and not a word was spoken.

In her delirium she could not forget the horror of Uncle Tom pulling away from her

and disappearing into the darkness, and she kept saying, "Don't go; don't go," crying after the last word as she had done when I had heard her call, "Tom, Tom, Tom!" It affected me greatly, but I could not tell whether Uncle Tom was affected or not, for his face was from me, and he walked steadily along.

Arriving within a short distance of the house, he gave her to me, and disappeared, and I went on toward the house.

At this moment the noisy town omnibus came in sight, with Number Two as the only passenger. After many failures and much noise the vehicle backed up to the front door, and Number Two deliberately alighted, having recovered from the Bends, and I called to him. He was weak and trembling from his long dissipation, but he was greatly interested at once, and helped me carry the poor girl up the stairs to her room. We visited her at intervals during the night, and although she always said she was better, she had not un-

dressed, and was lying across the bed; when she spoke to us we could detect an effort to convince us that she was really better, and that she had not been crying.

CHAPTER XXI.

I GET AN IDEA.

One day, six months after the disappearance of Uncle Tom, I was looking idly at the letter he had written, and it seemed to me that I could make out the name of a town and a State from the postmark on the envelope; a town as far west from Fog Lake as the City was east; a country on the frontier where men who had lost everything were likely to go. I remembered the country as it appeared on the school map because of the absence of lines indicating streams and railroads, but I took a new interest in it by reason of the conclusion to which I had come. The postal marks were quite indistinct, and I guessed at them as I might guess at a puzzle; but I found the name of the town I had hit upon in a directory at the post-office, credited to the State selected,

and I soon came to believe that Uncle Tom was there, and that he was in business again, for I believed that he would prosper in that way anywhere. It thus came about that I thought a great deal of going to the town, though I did not mention to any one my reasons for selecting this particular place, for since it had been found out that I was not the smartest boy in the world, I got along but poorly at home. They were always talking of getting a place for me, and of my own inactivity in the matter, and although Number One did nothing himself, his insolence because of my idleness became unbearable; I therefore determined to seek Uncle Tom, in the hope that I could find him and get something to do. I also believed that I might be able to explain away many things he did not understand, and do Mrs. Tom a great service, for I knew it was the one hope of her life to see her husband again.

I thought it for the best that I should go, for I was always talking to Mrs. Tom about

her husband, which only added to her trouble, and there was a complaint whenever I was with her alone. She bore up better than I expected, for she believed that Uncle Tom would come back to her finally, for he had appeared to her in the Brooper Woods, and might appear again; she even accepted his absence as a sort of deserved punishment for her failure to see him, which she had explained to me a hundred times by saying that the appearance of Mrs. Barnaby in the house rendered her helpless, and she could not move.

I told her one day of my intended departure, and she seemed glad I was going, though it was more because she knew I was not welcome at home than anything else, and when she offered to loan me the money necessary for the trip, I resolved to slip away as soon as possible, when no one was looking, that I might avoid the humiliation of seeing that they were all glad to be rid of me.

Joe Tack's experiment in politics had not been successful, and he was disgracefully beaten

for the Legislature; the men did not seem to appreciate being told that they were brutal husbands, although Joe thought they did, and most of them voted for a candidate who had no issue, further than that he was mean to his wife, and who could not make a speech. Joe had become rather too fond of his silver tongue, too, for he had made a great many speeches during the campaign, and, as he was rather tiresome, the people selected a man who could keep quiet.

Although we knew he was greatly disappointed, he said but little to indicate that he was, and went cheerfully to work again on his boiler, which held together surprisingly well, for it only blew up once in three months, and Joe was not seriously scalded then. He received a great many letters from Sarah, which abused the living Mrs. Tack as adroitly as ever, but not so frequently, for Sarah had a new grief, which was more important than jealousy; the manner in which the people had treated Joe at the election was very displeasing to her,

and she said plainly in the letters that the people around Fog Lake were unappreciative and envious and dull and contemptible. Joe pretended that he did not share in this opinion, but I could not help remarking that he never lost an opportunity to read the letters, and laugh at their absurdity. Whenever Joe told his ugly wife anything in the strictest confidence, and said that under no circumstances must it be repeated, she at once told it everywhere, and as she was shown the letters as a secret favor, the people soon knew how they were regarded by Sarah, and all of them knew who Sarah was.

I think Joe made practical use of this weakness of his wife to tell everything she was requested to keep quiet. A few days before he was ready to start his mill after an explosion, he would tell his wife as a profound secret that he would be ready to supply the people with lumber the next week, and surprise them, and Mrs. Tack would soon have

the information all over the neighborhood, though in the strictest confidence.

Joe's defeat for the Legislature had caused him to dislike me, for some reason, though I had nothing to do with it. A few days before I left Fog Lake for good I walked through the Brooper Woods for the last time with Mrs. Tom, and we called at the mill. The proprietor was very kind, and quite confidential, for he offered to show us a letter he had recently received from Sarah; but he soon thought better of this, so far as I was concerned, and would only show it to Mrs. Tom. This action I thought rather surprising, for he always pretended to esteem me very highly, and on our return home I persuaded Mrs. Tom to tell me of its contents, although I was afterwards sorry that I did, for it added another grief to my list. The letter said that the manner in which I was living off of Number One, who was a hard-working and worthy man, was the scandal of the neighborhood. This incensed me

so much that I told Mrs. Tom that I knew Joe Tack wrote the letters himself; but she was not surprised, and I think they had all known it a long time.

Mrs. Tom may have known that the real object of my proposed journey was to find her husband, and she may have believed that in case I did find him I could not keep the secret from her; but I thought that day that she was anxious for me to go. She was very thoughtful as we walked along, and did not even notice the place where Uncle Tom had disappeared the night he appeared to her. All along the road we were travelling I had pointed out places where scenes of the greatest interest to her had occurred, but she did not remark them on this particular day, although they had once had such a fascination for her that she walked the road almost every night; perhaps she was impatient to send out a courier in search of Uncle Tom; one who would assure him that she loved him as much as he ever believed, and trusted

him as much; a messenger who would never tire of saying that she was waiting patiently to do his bidding, whatever it might be, though she hoped with all her heart that his will would be to take her back, and give her one more chance.

My mother and her father were in particularly bad humor that day, for Number Two was on another bender, and everything was going so badly that I at last made up my mind to find the town of Hooper in the west; that was the name I had made out on the envelope. I had a horror of starting, for I knew that my money would only carry me to the town, and that, in case Uncle Tom was not there, I could not get back, and would be compelled to labor at some rough work for subsistence, and give up all hope of finding Uncle Tom. But they were all anxious to get rid of me on any terms, and that night, when they were all asleep, I left the house with as much stealth and trembling as though I had robbed them,

Number Two was roaring away in his room, so that I was not heard, and in a little while I was travelling a road I had never travelled before, and which I believed would take me out of the world.

Perhaps the fear I experienced in leaving Fog Lake was a premonition that my journey would be successful; it is possible that every one is rewarded for modest fear of their own capacity, as every one is punished for too much confidence.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TOWN IN THE WEST.

HAD the town I picked upon as the residence of Uncle Tom turned out the wrong one, I don't know what I should have done, for I arrived there without money; but fortunately I had not made a mistake in Hooper (I think there was originally a W before the H), and within half an hour after my arrival I stood before a store bearing his name in front in gaudy letters, for even the sign-painters seemed to partake of the flashy nature of the country. I felt company even in the presence of his name, and although I arrived quite early in the morning, and was walking rather aimlessly about when I made the discovery, the store was open, and the business of the day progressing.

When I walked in Uncle Tom had his back

to the door, engaged in suggesting an improvement in one of the shelves to a clerk, and although he was a little surprised when he turned and saw me, he soon recovered himself, and acted as though I was an acquaintance who lived in the town, and who had stepped in on some sort of an errand. I think I showed more surprise on seeing him than he did on seeing me, for he was greatly changed and had sunken cheeks, as though the task of thinking as much of the people in Hooper as he thought of the people in Fog Lake was a disagreeable and tiresome one.

He was as indifferent toward me as to any one, and while he was shaking hands with me a customer came in, and Uncle Tom supplied his wants before inquiring of me how they all were at home.

He was quite busy all that day, — it happened to be Saturday, — and although he talked to me occasionally, and took me to dinner at the hotel, he only referred to those at home as he might to acquaintances he cared little for,

and had seen within a week. The wives and children of the customers who came in from the country received the same polite attention he gave to me, and he seemed to treat all exactly alike. Once a man who was evidently of importance in the town stepped in for a few moments, and soon after he went away a farmer's dog followed his master into the store, and I thought he had as much consideration for one as the other.

I saw during the day that he was doing an enormous business, and that he was popular, which may have been one result of the exact justice he dealt out to all. From the loungers with whom I associated on the sidewalk I learned that he was running a "cash" store, and that there was great indignation among the other merchants, because people who owed them money patronized him. The loungers also agreed that Uncle Tom was doing the best business in the town, and that he deserved it, for he was a thorough good fellow.

These loungers interested me, and there was

one in particular whom I watched nearly all day. He was so fat and lazy-looking that he attracted my attention almost as soon as I saw the name of Thos. Saulsbury above the box on which the fellow sat, and as he was still there when I came out again, after seeing the proprietor, I looked at him more closely. He seemed to be looking at the sun and thinking, and since that was a new country, and the people quite poor, I wondered how such a lazy-looking man ever became so fat.

While watching him I saw a crowd collecting in the street a block away, and went over to see what was up; but the lazy man did not move, although he looked indolently at the people going that way. I found, on investigation, that a man had brought in a wolf, which his dogs had caught on his way to town; and although a wolf was a common sight there, the crowd lingered around it for an hour, as though they were looking for excuses to idle their time away. I finally began wondering if Uncle Tom would not join the

circle, for all the other people seemed to be taking a look at the dead wolf, and while looking toward the store, I saw the lazy man slowly approaching; he had succumbed at last, and after he joined the circle, he was the last one to go away.

The man whose dogs had caught the wolf told all the particulars twenty times to the new-comers, and the lazy man always listened with the greatest attention, though he asked no questions. At last, when the wolf was taken away, the lazy man remained awhile in the street alone, wondering where he would go next, finally waddling off toward the post-office, where he sat on the counter, and looked at those who came in. Here I heard him speak; in answer to a man who came in, and called him Bill, he said things down on Cow Creek were about the same as usual, and soon after he asked if he had any mail, and went out when he found there was nothing for him. The man with the wolf had a new crowd around him in front of the post-office, and Bill

joined the circle again, and listened with the greatest interest to the particulars of the capture, which he had heard many times before. When the wolf was carried away a second time, Bill was again left alone in the street, where he tried to collect his thoughts, and decide where he would go next. He decided on a livery stable not far away, where I soon followed, and found him sitting on a wagon-tongue. I heard him say to the proprietor of the stable that he had better take that bay horse; but the proprietor said he already had all the horses he wanted, and Bill did not speak again until after dinner, although I followed him around nearly all the morning. About noon he disappeared from the street, and I imagined he had a daughter living in town, and that he had gone over there to dinner. When he returned there was so much grease in the corners of his mouth that I was sure he had dined on bacon, but he was lazier than ever by reason of it, and did not move about so much as in the morning; indeed, he

occupied one box until near five o'clock, when he walked into Uncle Tom's store, bought ten cents' worth of saleratus, and began asking if any one knew of a wagon in from the Cow Creek way. He finally found one, and I saw him going away, seated in the bottom of the wagon-bed, and looking as though he would like to hear that wolf story once more.

There were a good many others on the streets who reminded me of Bill, and I wondered how Uncle Tom could prosper in such a place; but when I mentioned it to him he laughed, and said that Bill was all right; he would probably work the next day, as it would be Sunday, and all the stores would be shut up. Hooper seemed a wretchedly poor prairie town to me, but it drew trade from a large territory, and seemed to be prospering.

By six o'clock the rush was over, and Uncle Tom took me down to his house, — a comfortable two-story frame he had built, and where he lived with an old colored man who had been a house-servant in slavery days. The

house was completely furnished, and the old negro kept it very well, for he gave us a particularly good supper, and he seemed to have very good ideas about such things. I noticed that while in the kitchen he wore a cook's cap, but when he came in to serve he changed this for a waiter's jacket and apron.

Uncle Tom gradually approached the subject most in my thoughts, as the meal progressed, and finally said he had not received me more warmly because he had resolved to in future treat every one exactly alike; he had been in love once, and disappointed, and could not stand another experience like it; he believed it would kill him. He talked of this in a light way, but he had become so grave since I had seen him that had he told me ghost stories, I should have thought he believed in them.

"I was glad to see you," he said, "and I shall give you a place if you want it; but while I shall expect you to live here with me, I shall treat you exactly as I do all the

others. I shall never again be fond of any living thing. I am not a gloomy man, — of course it would not do for a philosopher to be gloomy, and I am a philosopher now, — but I am afraid to ever be fond of any one again; I would certainly be disappointed, and I could not stand it."

Soon after we retired to his room in the upper part of the house, and I noticed that while the curtains at the north and south windows were drawn, that on the east window was up; there was an easy-chair near it, and I thought he often sat there, and looked out into the night in the direction Mrs. Tom lived. I think he noticed that I remarked this arrangement, for he avoided the chair, and sat down at a table in front of the fire.

"I have a new love affair, with a lady named Margaret," he said, after a long silence, during which I believe we were both thinking that it would be exceedingly awkward to talk of Mrs. Tom under the circumstances.

He produced a small image of a woman,

made of some sort of metal, which had once been used to support the bowl of a lamp. This he held up for my inspection, and then put down on the table.

"Margaret is the most sensible woman in the world," he continued. "She has never once found fault with me, although I have been very trying at times, I imagine, to a lady of Margaret's fine sensibilities. For days and weeks I do not think of her, but she imagines I am busy, and says nothing. This is all the more remarkable when it is known that Margaret is very much in love with me. She would jump into the fire for me should I ask her. 'Margaret, my sweet mistress,' he said, addressing the image, 'I desire that you jump into the fire to convince this young man that you love me.'"

Thereupon he picked Margaret up, and threw her into the fire, where she was soon red-hot.

"She makes no complaint, you will notice," Uncle Tom said, listlessly gazing at his sweet mistress as she lay in the coals. "When it is

my pleasure for her to come out, she will come out, but not before, and she will never complain of the suffering she endured to gratify my whim."

When it seemed certain that Margaret would not complain of the heat, Uncle Tom removed her with the tongs, and set her down on the hearth to cool off.

"I wonder she is as faithful to me as she is. I have been trying to love her ever since I have been here, and although I have not succeeded very well, Margaret never complains; the sensible woman no doubt believes that I cannot fail to appreciate her in time. I hope that I shall, for she is very deserving. She never compares me unfavorably to a gentleman she might have married, and it has never occurred to Margaret at any time that her lot in life might have been better; that she might have found a man more competent and thoughtful than I am. She believes that I do the best I can, and is satisfied. Margaret has her faults; it might be imagined from her silence,

for example, that she is sullen; but she has more virtues than faults. This love affair with me may not be the only one in which she has been interested, but I do not hate any one on her account; there is a good deal in that. Admitting that she has been in love before, I should not care. I know her peculiar nature, and I cannot imagine her saying or doing anything that would displease me. There is a good deal in that, too."

Margaret had cooled off by this time sufficiently to be removed to the table, where Uncle Tom affectionately stroked her metal hair.

"I have never been thoughtful of Margaret, in spite of her devotion to me, and I have never been fond of her, of which I am ashamed; but in spite of it all she has confidence in me. If Mrs. Tom, for instance, should come into this house, Margaret wouldn't care; indeed, Margaret would be glad to see her, and make it as pleasant for her as she does for me. Even if she knew I had once been fond of

Mrs. Tom, it would make no difference with Margaret; if she knew that I have never been able to get over my insane fondness for Mrs. Tom, I believe that Margaret would still be my friend, and do all she could to relieve my sorrow, instead of trying to add to it, as some women do who find the man they love in trouble. This is a very unusual quality in a woman; particularly in a woman of fine sensibilities like Margaret.

"Her ideas on this question are so sound that they attract my warmest admiration. I cannot always cheerfully act upon Margaret's knowledge myself, but I admire her good sense. Every one should feel with reference to such matters as Margaret does, but they do not, and are very miserable; Margaret, I believe, is a very happy woman."

Uncle Tom was always fearful, I imagined, that I should believe him to be melancholy, and as he had been quite doleful while talking of his new love affair, he brightened up, and said that Margaret needed to be freshly

painted, as the imitation of bronze with which she had originally been clothed was becoming tarnished.

"I have thought that in case I ever become fond of Margaret I shall regret her silence; but lately I have concluded that her habit of saying nothing is a good thing. It is usually the case that when a woman is first in love she says a great many pretty things to her partner in folly, which gives him an exalted idea of himself. But one by one she recants all the pretty things she has said, and the man is worse off than though he had always been sensible; a poor man is better off for never having been a king. When a woman is first in love with you she pretends not to notice your faults; but it is certain that she remarks them, for she recounts them to the next fellow as evidence that she never really loved you. Mrs. Tom has said many pretty things to me, but I know now she never meant them, and I have foolish regrets that there is not

some one in the world who could say pretty things of me, and live by them."

"I shall always believe," I said, "that Mrs. Tom thinks as much of you now as she ever did."

"I am of the same opinion," he replied, in a tone which somehow convinced me that I had not advanced Mrs. Tom's cause. There was a subdued bitterness in his voice which convinced me that, while he could not help being fond of Mrs. Tom, he felt humiliation because she was not equally fond of him; there was an announcement in it that his spirit and pride had been humbled; but he soon commenced talking about the image again, and with a desperate sort of cheerfulness.

"Margaret has never told me she loves me; but she has never told me she does not, and as she lives with me, and finds no fault, I infer that she is satisfied. She has never said anything to me that I wanted to hear, — little remarks that I felt I was entitled to; but, on the other hand, she has said nothing that I did

not want to hear, and has generally been very discreet. I am free to imagine whatever I please of Margaret, and she never tells me I am mistaken either by word or action. But I see I can't keep you awake any longer, and you had better go to bed."

He had been noticing that I was sleepy, and in getting up from the table he jarred it in such a way that Margaret fell over on her face; but he did not take the pains to right her, feeling, no doubt, that with her usual good nature she would not complain.

He followed me into my room, and remained until I was in bed, when he reluctantly withdrew. He had a habit of reading in bed, — books of a severe philosophical cast, usually, — and this night he read so late that when I awakened and saw his light still burning, I thought the patient Margaret must have rebelled at last, and that he was busy explaining away that which the excellent woman had so long borne in silence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. HICKEY.

THE Monday after my arrival in Hooper (the people always pronounced the name of the town as though it was Whooper, and was great at Whooping up things, though it was not) I was given a place in the store, and, as Uncle Tom had been somewhat crowded with office-work, I helped him in that; I was willing to undertake to write a fairly good hand, and believed that Uncle Tom would be so patient in teaching me that my willingness would soon enable me to give tolerable satisfaction. His promptness in giving me a place encouraged me to try very hard to please him, and the duties he marked out for me I worked at with all my might.

I wrote home telling them I had found a

place; but I did not mention who my benefactor was, though I wrote as few letters as possible, fearful that I could not keep the secret. Uncle Tom never told me not to mention it; but I supposed he preferred to remain hidden, or he would have told of his whereabouts himself. I lived with the proprietor in his wooden house on the edge of the town, and as I had made friends with his old negro servant, whose name was Archie, I was quite comfortably situated.

One of the clerks in the store, I discovered during the idle day following my arrival, was the renowned Mr. Hickey, of whom Mrs. Footit talked so much. Considering that he was rather an old man, he was a foolish sort of a fellow, and I often amused myself by telling him what a large, splendid man Footit was, and how rich he had become. Although Hickey was quite a gay old chap, and murmured a good deal because of the lack of society in Hooper, he had a warm heart, for when I occasion-

ally walked about in the evening with him, and told of Mrs. Footit's devotion to him, he quietly wiped his moist eyes with one of the handkerchiefs we advertised as leaders at six for twenty-five cents, and said that memory was a certain but ruthless friend.

If Hickey had ever been married, as Mrs. Footit had stated, he was evidently a widower when I knew him, for he was always going to sociables, which were the only amusements the town afforded; and if he had ever been rich, he had seen hard times, and lost his money, for he was certainly quite poor when I knew him, except in affection; he had plenty of that, and was always offering to give it away. I was convinced that Mrs. Footit's entire story was a fiction, except that she had once been engaged to him; and while Hickey pretended to fondly remember his old sweetheart, he was evidently not sincere, for it was said of him that he was always trying to marry some one. There was a story current to the effect that Hickey had

tried to marry a certain widow, but she preferred a better man, and Hickey then paid court to her oldest daughter. The daughter married away from him, too, and he became attentive to a still younger daughter, and the story went that, after she married, Hickey continued to visit the house, although the only girl left was just turning fifteen.

There were a number of church organizations in the town, for it is the history of the frontier that while the first man to arrive in a county is at work building a court-house, his wife is busy arranging for a church, and Hickey attended all their sociables, and mite societies, and that sort of thing. It was his habit to say that he liked all the churches so well that he had not been able to make up his mind which one to join as a permanent arrangement, though I used to fear he would die of old age without connecting himself with any of them. But Hickey thought of himself as quite a boy, in spite of his age, and preferred my

society to that of the older ones in the store, though I heard him say one time, when his judgment had been questioned about something, that he had been a clerk for forty years, and ought to know what he was talking about.

Though Hickey was an extremely good man, I did not like him very well, and, as the town was quite dull, I spent most of my evenings at home with Uncle Tom, who treated me with the greatest kindness and consideration, and who always seemed glad to have me with him, in spite of his resolve to have no favorites.

Although he was apparently cheerful, I knew him to be a very wretched man. Occasionally he would forget that a philosopher should never be gloomy, and go about his duties in a quiet way that was distressing, when it was said around the store that the "old man" was troubled. Uncle Tom was not an old man, but he was privately referred to as one by the clerks; even Hickey did it, although

Hickey might have been Uncle Tom's father had he married as early as he desired.

Uncle Tom was quite well known in that country, and popular, too, I think; but he never went anywhere, and when he could find an excuse for it, he worked at the store until a late hour, as if he was better satisfied when at work than at any other time.

At night, at the house, when he talked to me, and I sought polite excuse to go to bed, being of a sleepy turn, he would introduce a more interesting subject, with a view of keeping me with him, and I always felt that he was mourning for the loss of Mrs. Tom, therefore he did not surprise me when he told me so one night, with his usual frankness. He was seated in an easy-chair in front of the window looking toward Fog Lake, with his feet resting on the sill, and had just pointed out a pathway of stars which seemed to end directly over the house where Mrs. Tom lived; a pathway he watched a great deal, he told me, although it always made him lonely.

"I am as fond of Mrs. Tom as I ever was," he said; "and while I can convince myself that I should not be, I soon forget my arguments, and am as foolish as ever. I shall have a good deal of charity in future for the men who have bad habits, and cannot overcome them, although they know better. All the common sense and all the logic, all the arguments, in short, are on the side of my forgetting Mrs. Tom; but I am weaker in my heart than in my head, I suppose, and I cannot do it, although I am about the only man in the world who has permitted the love-craziness to occupy his mind for nearly three years. There is absolutely nothing in it; no one knows that better than I do, yet no one knows quite as well as I do that the lack of it is gradually breaking me down. Mrs. Tom used to say that everything I did was right, and that she could not live without me; but she knows now that everything I do is not right, and she is living without me."

He was gazing out into the darkness, at the

pathway of stars leading toward the house where Mrs. Tom lived. The pathway was so indistinct to my eyes that I could scarcely make it out, but it seemed clearly defined to Uncle Tom, and after a long silence he pointed out a particular star which was brighter than the others, and which he was sure hovered over Mrs. Tom every night.

"Had there been anything in love," he continued later, "Mrs. Tom never would have refused to see me that night. They say a love affair is more serious and important to a woman than to a man. Well, I suppose it is; but had she trusted in me as I trusted in her, I should have been a very contented man now, instead of one of the most wretched in the world."

I told him, then, that I had heard Mrs. Tom say that she had exactly the trust in him that he expected, but that when she was told that Mrs. Barnaby was in the house expressly to make him trouble, she was powerless to speak or move; that she wanted to

go to him, and express her confidence, but could not.

The reference to Mrs. Barnaby did not do him any good, apparently, for when he continued, there was more bitterness in his tone: —

"It is not what you want to do that counts in life, but what you really do. Usually when a man is accused his defence is weak, but had they heard me that night I should have vindicated myself; I had the proofs to show them. It would have been the one memorable event in my life had Mrs. Tom permitted me to convince her that her confidence in me was deserved. There was a time when I did not think so much of honor as I do now, but I was very anxious that night to prove that every unfavorable charge made against me was untrue. It is not often that even guilty men are denied a hearing."

I thought there was a great deal in his statement, that it is not what you want to do, but what you really do, that counts in life. I had always been willing to become a banker,

or a great man in some other way, but what I had really done that was creditable amounted to almost nothing. I thought he referred to me, it applied so well; it may occur to others that he referred to them.

"That is the reason love is so unsatisfactory; it is helpless in misfortune, and is not a thing you can go to in trouble. It is well enough in a time of peace, but a little adversity causes it to fly away in search of bright days and moonlight nights; that is the reason I am ashamed of being in love. I would not feel more disgusted with myself were I a firm believer in Santa Claus, in spite of the knowledge that all other men had outgrown the pleasant delusion with their childhood. I have been trying to become fond of Margaret; if I succeed, I hope she will confess to me that she is a widow; a widow is a cynic on the subject of love, and will give a husband a chance. But should I marry Margaret and find her a maid, she would contrast me, as a matter-of-fact husband, with the lover she was

most fond of, and I would be in competition with a god, and fail. Had Margaret married the lover she was most fond of as a girl, she would have discovered how little there is in love; I think her present good sense must be due to the fact that she is a widow. A young wife is forever finding you out; without meaning to be deceitful, you lead her to believe that you are better than you are, from a mingled sense of hope for the future, and a determination to do better than you have done; but a widow has the charity that contact with the world alone can give, and is not surprised if she does find you out. Margaret would accept a husband just as he is. Where is the old girl?"

He got up from his chair, and went to looking for Margaret, finding her at last on a desk that stood in the room.

"She has scars all over her," he said, examining the image critically; "the widow evidently had a rough time with the lover she thought most of. She would make some one

a good wife; if I could get Mrs. Tom out of my mind, I should propose myself. The oftener a woman has been in love, the more pretty things she thinks of to say, — every new lover suggests something pretty, and she repeats it to the next one. If Margaret could speak, I have an idea she would make delicious love to me, since a woman thinks as well of one man as of another. Mrs. Tom used to smile so sweetly that it makes me lonesome to think about it, but I remember that she smiled at every one in exactly the same way."

He talked a good deal about Margaret that night, and once he startled me by referring to Mrs. Barnaby in a rather surprising way. Mrs. Barnaby had somehow discovered his whereabouts, and written that she was anxious to give him half the property in the City, and although he had refused to take a penny of it, feeling that he could excuse his conduct better without it, he could not help admiring the spirit that prompted the offer; he

admired it so much, indeed, that he said he sometimes thought that he would return to the City, and offer to make up with Mrs. Barnaby, and finish his life with her, as a means of proving beyond any sort of question that there was nothing in love. He still hated her, he said, but his life in the City before he knew Mrs. Tom had been no more dreadful than his life away from it, now that he had forever lost Mrs. Tom.

Besides, it would settle his misery, and he would have no more ridiculous dreams of possible content in the future; a form of dreaming he could not avoid. He had thought quite seriously of the Mrs. Barnaby proposition, he said, and seemed so much in earnest that I was uneasy; but he said later that he was afraid to approach her on the subject, as he felt certain that she would drive him out of the house. He talked about the matter so much and so seriously that I came to believe that had Mrs. Barnaby called upon him, and proposed a reconciliation, he would have ac-

cepted the offer, simply as a means of getting rid of his hope of more peace in the future, which he believed to be only a foolish fancy, but which he could not get rid of, and which caused him much unrest.

When I left him he was examining Margaret for fresh evidence that she had been ill-treated by the lover she had once worshipped, and finally married, and the surprising number of bruises and scars he found seemed to convince him that all those who fell in love suffered for it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MAN'S STORY.

Six months after I arrived in Hooper I received a letter one morning from Mrs. Tom, saying she was coming to see me within a few days. Immediately on the receipt of her letter I went to the hotel to arrange for her entertainment, and found that she had arrived a half hour before, and the hotel people were on the point of sending out for me when I appeared.

She told me, after we were seated in the hotel parlor, that she had long suspected that I was with Uncle Tom, and that she had made the journey — it was an important journey to Mrs. Tom, who was not accustomed to travelling — in the hope of seeing him, and that she knew before I appeared that the belief that her husband was in Hooper was right, for the hotel

people had told her that I was employed by my uncle, Tom Saulsbury, and that she had heard them tell the messenger to look for me at his place. So the secret was out, and I told her that I would announce her arrival to Uncle Tom, which arrangement she consented to with a gasping for breath, which indicated that she was excited.

Mrs. Tom was looking a little paler than when I had seen her last, and was still timid and nervous, as though she had committed a great sin for which she greatly desired forgiveness, but in all other respects she was so much like her old self that it did me good to see her.

She had been quite economical with her money, it seemed, for everything she had on I had seen before, and her baggage consisted of a very small and modest hand-bag, which she hoped would not be stolen. I was quite proud of her appearance till I remembered that no one appreciated Mrs. Tom until they had known her awhile, but as I walked back to the store

I thought no one could fail to admire such a neat, pretty woman as she was, even at first glance.

I told Uncle Tom as calmly as I could that Mrs. Tom was at the hotel, and wished to see him, if he could make it convenient; and he said of course he would see her, with as little emotion as he might have shown in quoting the price of an article in his store.

This was not very encouraging, but I noticed that his manner changed at once, and that he did whatever he was about with a nervousness which he could not control.

He said he had a number of letters to write before he could call at the hotel with me, and while he was about it in the office at the rear of the store I sat down near him, and waited, and he kept up his studied indifference by asking me, as he folded letter after letter, how Joe Tack's saw-mill enterprise was flourishing, how Mrs. Footit was, and how my grandfathers were, supposing Mrs. Tom had already told me the gossip of Fog Lake. I remarked this par-

ticularly, because when I had called on him in the City he did not speak to me for hours at a time, but now he was anxious to be polite, precisely as he would have been polite to any one, and I feared that he would be equally indifferent to Mrs. Tom; he would apply his new rule to her, and treat her with the same politeness he would a farmer's wife with eggs to sell.

He had a list of the letters he was to write, and checked them off as he went along, and just before beginning the last one he asked me to step over to the hotel and say to Mrs. Tom that he desired to meet her easily and without restraint, as he might a casual acquaintance; and as the hotel was only a little way from the store, I had performed the errand and returned before he had entirely finished the last letter. As soon as this was enclosed in an envelope and directed, he put on his hat, and went out with me, stopping at the post-office on his way, where he mailed his letters, and looked over the mail in his

box with an air of business concern. Indeed, I expected him to return to the store at once, and answer the letters he had found in his box, but he did not, and walked with me toward the hotel, speaking politely and pleasantly to those he met, and stopping to talk to a few of them, but always on business.

Arriving at the hotel, he lingered a moment at the entrance to say a word to the proprietor, — something he had been inquiring for had arrived at the store, — and then went on upstairs to the parlor, where I had told him Mrs. Tom was waiting.

At sight of him Mrs. Tom showed signs of breaking down, but only for a moment, for Uncle Tom greeted her with a quiet unconcern that would have restored any one, — as he might have greeted a friend's wife whom he knew but slightly, an acquaintance of a month, or a stranger who had business with him. He must have known that she had come to Hooper particularly to see him; but he inquired if she had been delayed there,

and when she was going on; to all of which Mrs. Tom replied in the simplest way: she had not been delayed; she would return home that night, and was not going on, etc. The conversation between them was easy and natural, much more so than I had imagined possible; and I remember the first thing said was, "How do you do?" from Uncle Tom, to which Mrs. Tom replied that she was quite well. For a moment it seemed out of place to me that two old friends as they were should be so constrained; but in a little while they acted quite naturally, and Uncle Tom spoke of their past at considerable length, Mrs. Tom looking at him, and listening with her old veneration, to which had been added a touching timidity.

"There is one part of my life that I want to tell you," Uncle Tom said, "as much in justice to you as to myself, and you will excuse me, I hope, if I seem to make a long story of it. I will also speak plainly of matters which might once have been disagreeable

to both of us, because of an unwise sentimentality, but which we may now speak of with as little concern as we might refer to the foolish fancies of our youth.

"Mrs. Barnaby was a handsome girl, as she is still a handsome woman, and I imagined I was in love with her. I never imagined I loved her as much as I know I loved you, but as is usual with very young men when concerned in an affair of this kind, I believed that Mrs. Barnaby as a girl was a sort of angel who had none of the human weaknesses I despised in myself. Young men of little experience are apt to make this mistake; but when I loved you I knew as much of women as men ever know, and I am certain I thought more of you, though I knew you to be a woman, than I ever did of Mrs. Barnaby, though I believed her to be an angel. There was this difference between my love for you and my love for Mrs. Barnaby: I knew you, and I didn't know her; but I suppose I loved Mrs. Barnaby, and I believe I was proud of

the alliance I made with her. An hour before we were married, however, she displeased me and became displeased herself because anything she should do should offend me. We have never recovered from that quarrel; we both promised to love and honor with the mental reservation that the other must first give in.

"The stubbornness which I practised then was wicked, and I paid the penalty by leading a wretched life, but it was my nature, and young men are more apt to be foolishly stubborn than those who are older and wiser. When I came to you I was so much wiser that nothing could have induced me to be stubborn again, knowing the penalty, but I had gone so far that a reconciliation was impossible. I hated her, and she knew it; she hated me, and I knew it.

"In course of time I resolved upon a legal separation. I would not speak to her about it, as we had lived apart, and not spoken to each other, for years, so I took the necessary step to secure a legal residence in the State

where you lived, intending to commence proceedings there for a divorce; I imagined that this would avoid publicity, which I dreaded, and did it with good intentions.

"After securing the legal residence — you may not have known before that I owned a small business in a town near Fog Lake, which I operated by means of an agent — the divorce proceedings were commenced, and all the forms honestly complied with. Notice was sent to Mrs. Barnaby by mail, as the law required, and, as she made no reply, I supposed she believed, as I did, that a divorce was the best thing possible in our case. We were hopelessly estranged, and there was no reason why she should not agree to it, for none of my allegations were discreditable to her, and I had no intention of wronging her in any way.

"During this time I lived under the same roof with her when in the City, and saw her occasionally, but she never spoke to me nor I to her.

"In course of time the trial came on, and, as she made no defence, the divorce was granted. I never suspected that she did not have full knowledge of the proceedings, and, when I returned to the City, I imagined that we would get together in course of time, and amicably divide our possessions in the presence of mutual friends. But she was out of town, and did not return for several months, which I accepted as further evidence that she was content with what I had done.

"I need not speak of my meeting with you, further than that I first met you after the divorce was granted, and while in Fog Lake on a hunting expedition. Your uncle simply knew that I was from the City, and, with a view of inducing me to invest in some of his schemes, he showed me rather marked attention; indeed, he invited me to his house, where I saw a quiet girl whom they tried to keep out of the way as much as possible. They regarded you of so little importance that they did not even introduce me to you,

though we became acquainted, and you interested me, and after that I made regular trips to Fog Lake when there was no fishing or shooting. You remember all that; but you may not remember that the people made unkind remarks concerning my attentions to you, believing me to be an adventurer, and this was one reason why I proposed that we be married in such haste; and another reason was that I found in you the woman I wanted. Your gentle amiability and your great confidence in me were delightful revelations after my harsh experiences with life, and I became hopelessly infatuated with the magic of your presence; your gentle voice soothed the war in my heart, and your soft touch lulled me into a sense of peace I had never known before.

"I did wrong in not telling you of Mrs. Barnaby, but it was not a pleasant subject, and I kept putting it off; perhaps I did wrong in marrying you so hastily, but my coming to see you so often attracted unfavor-

able comment, and we were married on an hour's notice.

"I pretended to be a travelling salesman for Barnaby & Co. originally to prevent your uncle buying goods of me, for I imagined we did not want his trade; so you married me with that impression. I kept the secret at first with the hope of giving you a pleasant surprise, and was always planning to take you to a home in the City, where you would discover that I was more of a man than even you had imagined in your palatable charity.

"When I returned home after our marriage I found to my dismay and horror that Mrs. Barnaby had also returned from one of her long visits among friends, and that she professed never to have heard of the divorce proceedings. She made the announcement by bursting into my room with the ferocity of a tiger, and accused me of duplicity, dishonor, and meanness. I procured affidavits showing that notice had been sent her as the law required, but, as she was away from home a good deal,

the papers had been mislaid, and had only turned up recently. Their turning up at all was the best evidence possible that I had acted honestly and in good faith, but she would not so see it, and believed that I had wronged her.

"For years before that we had not spoken, but regularly after this she came into my room and reproached me in the most cruel manner. At first I tried to convince her that it was for the best; that, since I had not endeavored to take advantage of her property right, there was no reason why she should complain, even though she had been tricked, for she must admit that we would never live together, and would be better off apart; but nothing that I could say did any good, and she announced one night that she would commence proceedings to set the divorce aside. I then made an appeal to her so strong that I shall always hate her because it did not move her, but she rejoiced in my misery, and commenced the suit, using my means to humiliate and injure me.

"I had the best of it from the first, for all my proceedings had been honestly conducted, but she had capable attorneys in her employ, who managed to prevent a decision. I won in the court which originally granted the divorce, because the officers themselves knew I had not acted in a deceptive manner; I clearly established that the notice required by law had been given, but the other side took an appeal to a higher and slower court.

"I do not think she suspected that I had married again, but it is possible that she believed I had such an intention, so she protracted the suit, and the expenses were enormous, as I had reason to know, for I was compelled to pay the bills.

"All this time I was your husband, and, in spite of the uncomfortable condition of my affairs, I loved you so much, and you were so useful to me, that I was more content than I had ever been before. I occasionally had pangs of remorse because I did not tell you of my situation, but I believed you had

the utmost confidence in me, and so I resolved that I would not make the disclosure until after the matter was decided in my favor, as I was certain it would be. My judgment was right; the final decision was rendered a month ago, and the original decree was declared legal and valid; you were an honorable wife."

Mrs. Tom made a move as if she would go to her husband, but he held up his hand in remonstrance.

"During all this time I staked my hope of the future on your confidence in me, which you so often expressed, but at the critical moment it failed you. You were like many other women: you were human, although you often seemed divine. All the humiliation Mrs. Barnaby heaped upon me in years did not equal the humiliation you heaped upon me in a moment by refusing to see me, and hear what I had to say. Although you never said so, I had no doubt you would have given your life to me; it was my fault that I for-

got your humanity, and believed that for once this lover's declaration was true. I believed that had I hoisted a window in a high building, and said that it was necessary for you to jump out, you would have said a hurried good-by to me, and plunged out without the slightest hesitation.

"It was my fault that I had such confidence in your trust in me; my better sense should have taught me that you were only a woman, after all. During that walk through the woods, when Mrs. Barnaby was accusing me at every step of meanness and villany, I boasted of your confidence in me, and said that when she saw you, she would see a woman a man could love and die for. It was the first time I ever boasted in my life, and Mrs. Barnaby was present to see my humiliation.

"Although I pretended that I did not, I believed all you ever said to me during our love affair, and all that your actions implied. I knew from long experience with the world

what a mythical thing love is. The best of women have numerous love affairs before they finally marry and settle down, and no one knew better than I did that they repeated the same story to the second, third, or fourth fancy that had delighted the first: that he was handsome, brave, generous, and talented; that she could not live without him; that she would cheerfully die to serve him; that life was a burden without him, and a joy with him; that there was but one true love, and that he had hers, — I knew this because it was human nature, and human nature never changes; but notwithstanding this knowledge, and the knowledge that the men are still worse, I believed all you said to me, and cherished the memory of it.

"There was one difference between me and the ordinary lover: when you said I was brave, and handsome, and good, I knew better, but I thought it had pleased God to send me a wife who really thought so, and I did all I could to deserve your good opinion. The good

things you believed of me did me no harm, but I tried so hard to deserve them that they made me better. There are moments when the strongest men become children again; I once knew a baby that would cry when any one said it was a bad boy, and try to deserve the confidence of the friend who insisted that he was really a good boy. There is not as much difference between a man and a child as is generally believed.

"I refused to live with Mrs. Barnaby because I hated her, and she hated me, and because I knew my humiliation would be constant should I pretend to forget the past, knowing that she would still entertain the unfavorable opinion of me she had so often expressed. I refuse to live with you because I love you, and because I believe that while I married you as I would have married no other woman, and from motives of the purest love, you married me because it seemed to your interest, and as you would have married any other man who promised fairly well.

This would be on my mind constantly, and I should feel humiliated by the recollection whenever I thought of you; the pretty things you might say and do in the future I should regard as duty, with the unsteady foundation which I have discovered that love rests upon. Perhaps you will better understand me if I say that I so long believed you to be an ideal woman that I cannot bring myself to the realization that, after all, you are a real human woman; I was so utterly spoilt during my infatuation that I would not be satisfied with you now. I fear that the sad experience of Old Barnaby and Mrs. Barnaby would be repeated; so I have determined to live by a new philosophy, — the philosophy of common sense, based on a knowledge of human nature. In future I shall love the book, or house, or horse I own, precisely as much as I love my friends and acquaintances; I shall love the houses and horses more, for while my friends are certain to disappoint me, the horses and houses never will, for I shall expect nothing

from them. Another disappointment of the kind I had with you would kill me; I cannot afford to fall in love again. At present I love you as much as I ever did, but I shall no doubt get over it."

It was plain to be seen that he had been having a weary time trying to get over his love for Mrs. Tom; his manner indicated it, but his manner also indicated that he would keep on trying.

Mrs. Tom heard the story through as a wretched prisoner might hear his condemnation to death; she did not move or speak, but there was an expression of helpless sorrow on her face that was pitiful to see. When she did speak it was as a condemned prisoner might address a just judge, and excuse his crime as much as possible.

"I shall return home to-night," she said, "and spend my life in praying for your forgiveness, and in praying that you will take me back. I believe I can understand why you feel so bitter toward me, for I can never

hope to convince you that you had the trust and confidence from me that you once believed you had. When they told me that you had sent for me, and were in trouble, my strength left me; but it was all because of the trouble you were in; as I live, I never once thought of myself; never have I doubted that you were right. When I started just now at your announcement that I was an honorable wife, it was because of joy that my opinion of you had turned out true; it was joy over my husband's triumph; I cared nothing for myself; if you were ever so wrong, I should ask no greater blessing than that you take me back. If you should tell me you were wrong, I should believe in secret that you were right, and that you manfully accepted a burden to which you were not entitled. You used to say you were glad I didn't know anything; I had hoped that this feeling might cause you to excuse my not knowing what to do at a critical time, but I feel now that you never will, though I do not

blame you. Everything you do seems right to me; it has always seemed so. I shall always feel as kindly toward you, and love you as much as though you had taken me back. Won't you kiss me once more?"

She looked up at him timidly out of her soft eyes, which were full of tears, and Uncle Tom stepped over and did as he was requested.

"Thank you," she said, brightening a little, as he sat down nearer to her. "I know that I wronged you at the most critical time in your life, but I did not intend to."

"I covet your good opinion as much as I ever did," he said, "and it pleases me to know that you think I am right, though I am not. There are men who are unjust to the women they love because injustice delights them, but I hope you will acquit me of that; my stubbornness is monstrous, I know, though I cannot help it. I wonder that I hold you responsible for my humiliation, for when I forget that, you are more to me now than

you ever were; I have been so restless of late that even your presence in the town rests me. I should have known of your arrival had I not been told of it; you change the air about you, I think, and it does me good to breathe it. But after you are gone, my sober sense will tell me that I drank the draught that intoxicated me, and then praised it. I believe that it is for the best that we never live together again. I wronged you in not telling you of Mrs. Barnaby, and you can never forget it; you may think you have forgotten it, but really you have not, and you never can. No amount of apology or repentance ever atones for a wrong you have suffered, and while you did right in refusing to see me, I was so firmly convinced that you would see me, that I can never feel right about it again. My stubbornness is more the recollection of a wrong than a crime, though it is a crime against myself; I sincerely hope that you do not suffer because of it as I do. Were it not cowardly I would kill myself to get rid of

my trouble. I try to be sensible, but I cannot; I can do no better than I am doing, and I could not do worse. I find that the spark of love you kindled into a flame is as stubborn as my hate for Mrs. Barnaby was; surely you cannot forgive that?"

"I never thought unkindly of you in my life," Mrs. Tom answered; "I never shall."

"You are receiving but a wretched return for your faith in me," he said in reply, "though I once promised so much, and would have fulfilled every promise had I not been stunned by a hard blow. Let me say, in order that you may better understand me, that I cannot separate your motive from a selfish one; it seems to me you came here not because you love me, as I once believed you did, but because you felt that you would be better off with me than you would be living alone at Fog Lake. I want to believe that you love me as I once thought you did, but my own weakness causes me to doubt it. I am willing to forgive your humanity, but the

ideal love I thought I possessed was so grateful and helpful to me that I can never be satisfied with any other. I am not a good man, but somehow I think I am, and mourn because others are not equally honest and sincere. I cannot separate you from the world, as I once did, and the attention I should pay you in the future would seem the attention of a silly man to an idol in which he was mistaken. I once thought your love was worth all my energy, but I should now feel like a victim; like a man who is always giving and never receiving.

"I could do that with Chance, but with you, the one I love most in all the world, I could not; it is one of the strange things of that which we call love. It is horrible to say it, but while I have forgiven Mrs. Barnaby, whom I hated, I cannot forgive you, whom I love, though I hope you will be as charitable with me as you can. It does not seem possible that I can ever become indifferent to you, but I really believe that I shall; I believe

that you will become indifferent to me, and that we will both agree after a time that we were wise in not attempting to live together again. A love affair once seriously interfered with can never be entirely made up; love is such a tender flower that when it is wounded, either by accident or design, it can never be strong again. Good-by."

Quickly catching her face in his hands, he kissed her lips, and was gone.

Mrs. Tom believed he had left the place for good, and would never return, as he had steadily refused to return to the City, and I went out to look for him. He was not to be found, but I assured her that he would return after her departure. It was a cruel thing to say, but I did not think how it sounded until Mrs. Tom's sobbing reminded me.

But she knew it was true, and made preparations to depart.

The train she was to take was not due for an hour or more, and we walked around awhile, passing the store and the house, both

of which she looked at admiringly, because they belonged to him. I wanted her to go in the house, but she would not, though she was interested when I pointed out the window where he usually sat at night, and looked toward Fog Lake. I was sorry I could not point out the pathway of stars, which could always be seen at night, and she said she would try to find it after her return home.

She cried a little after I had seated her in one of the cars, when the train arrived, but she was more cheerful when I said I was coming to see her soon, though I detected a little sob when she finally said good-by.

Uncle Tom did not return that night, but from his window I saw the stars in the pathway come out one by one, and felt that he was watching it, as though Mrs. Tom was really travelling it on her weary journey home.

CHAPTER XXV.

A BAD NIGHT.

Uncle Tom was at the store as usual next morning, and while I thought he had been watching for me to appear, he said nothing of the events of the day before. I did not know where he had spent the night, but I imagined, from the large number of letters for the mail that morning, that he had spent much of the time in writing to customers, and calling their personal attention to his facilities for supplying their wants.

It may have been the result of a bad night, but I thought he looked unusually pale that day, and this caused me to wonder if he had not been failing for some time, as a result of the wretched way in which he lived, and the too vigorous manner in which he worked. But he seemed determined to

shake it off, for I had never before seen him so interested in his business. He received almost every customer that came in, and tried to become as much interested in them as he was in Mrs. Tom, and inquired with the greatest cordiality after absent acquaintances; but for all this I knew he spent a wretched day.

He went to sleep in his chair that night, and when I looked into his room before retiring, I saw his face was flushed and feverish, and that he was breathing rapidly. In the middle of the night he awakened me, and said he believed he was ill, and asked me to to do him some small favor. In rambling about the house I disturbed the sleep of old Archie, and when I told him what I wanted, and why I wanted it, he commenced grumbling because of Uncle Tom's refusal to take certain bitters he had offered him several months before. The old negro, I then discovered, had noticed his master's tendency to break down some time before, and he

grumbled around most of the night because his advice had not been taken sooner.

He appeared at the store at rather a late hour the next morning, but did not remain long, and soon wrapped himself up and returned home, walking away in a manner so weak and unsteady that it was surprising in one usually so strong.

At the close of the day, when I followed him, he talked quite freely of his condition, and expressed the opinion that it was due to his inability to sleep. Many nights, he said, he did not close his eyes at all, and he had not slept soundly for a long time. He had been talking with a medical man during the day, who had advised him that he needed rest.

"But the trouble is," Uncle Tom said, "I cannot take it. I wish I could go back to Fog Lake; I would soon rest up in the company of Mrs. Tom."

This was a matter of wonder to me, and I could make nothing of it; he said he could

soon rest up in the company of Mrs. Tom, yet he had just sent Mrs. Tom away. But I have heard men say that much that was strange to them in their youth was perfectly plain in their manhood.

He was quite cheerful about the matter, though, further than that he said he had a horror of being alone at night, so I arranged with old Archie to remain with him until one o'clock in the morning, when he was to call me, and I would remain until daylight, or until he fell asleep. He did not know of the arrangement, but he seemed glad to have even old Archie with him, for as I tried to get to sleep in an adjoining room I heard them talking of old times in Virginia, where Archie had been a slave, and where he had seen spirits, and all that sort of thing. Archie had been a good man himself, I gathered from their talk, but there was a certain slave man on the plantation where he was brought up who ran away whenever there was the slightest opportunity, whereupon

the dogs were brought out to chase him, and the dogs were baying in a peculiar way at the foot of a tree when I went to sleep. I remember thinking, the last thing before going to sleep, that I would ask Archie in the morning whether the slave man had really climbed the tree, and what happened to him when he was returned home.

When I awoke again I had a consciousness of having been called, and that it was time for me to relieve old Archie. I listened for a moment, and discovered that the slave man was probably gone for good, for the men and dogs had returned from the hunt, thoroughly disheartened.

Suddenly the conversation changed, and Uncle Tom asked the negro if he had ever been in love. Old Archie almost suffocated himself with laughter in replying that he had been, often, and that he had been married five times. Uncle Tom asked him why he laughed at the thought of having been in love; and though the negro could not tell why he laughed, he continued to be greatly amused.

Which wife had he loved the most? — all about the same, old Archie thought; since he hoped to meet them all in heaven (old Archie was religious), which one did he intend to spend most of his time with? — he didn't know for sure, but he expected it was Amanda; that would please Amanda, but how about the other four? — the other four would have other jewels to content them, probably; men jewels? — oh, no, precious jewels, to wear in their crowns, for they had been fond of dress; all of them dead? — no, none of them dead, so far as he knew; been divorced from them? — no, from none of them; intend to marry again? — no, had enough of marrying; any particular sad experience? — no, just had enough of marrying. So the conversation went while I was dressing, and the subject remained in Uncle Tom's mind after Archie had retired, for as he walked around with a sheet about him — he could not remain in bed, and I was fearful he would catch cold — he continued to talk of the same subject.

"I am only a remarkable man in one particular," Uncle Tom said, after old Archie had disappeared; "I can laugh at my own weaknesses. When I was living at Fog Lake, and announced an intention of returning to my work, Mrs. Tom had a way of saying, 'Don't go,' that touched my heart as it was never touched before. There was a world of pathos, regret, and unselfish love in the way she said it, I thought, and I think I was prouder of that than of anything else; it indicated that some one mourned my absence and enjoyed my presence. But one day Mrs. Tack called at the house while I was at home, and when she arose to depart, Mrs. Tom said, 'Don't go,' in exactly the same tones she had used with me, although Mrs. Tack was the most disagreeable person I ever knew; Mrs. Tom so considered her, I think. I never mentioned it before, but that was the grief of my life with Mrs. Tom. It was ridiculous in me, but I mourned a great deal over that foolish thing; after it happened, I hated the man

Mrs. Tom might have married had I not appeared. But for this circumstance I would have forgiven Mrs. Tom that night when I carried her in my arms in the woods, and when she kept saying, 'Don't go; don't go.' It is brutal for me to feel as I do concerning a little matter, but I am helpless, though I hate myself for it. When I think how forgiving Mrs. Tom is, and how good she is, and how stubborn I am, I fear that I am a very wicked man. Did you notice when she said the other day that her distress over this affair was largely due to the circumstance that I was wretched too? Very few women would have thought of that; Mrs. Barnaby always thought she was a martyr, and that I enjoyed making her wretched."

His speaking of the plaintive manner in which Mrs. Tom had said, "Don't go," reminded me of her as she wandered about in the Brooper Woods, calling, "Tom, Tom, Tom," and I mentioned the matter. He had

heard her, he said, the night he appeared to her, when he happened to be making the same walk he made with Mrs. Barnaby, and when he had little hope of seeing Mrs. Tom. He was coming back because there was a sort of terrible fascination in the vicinity, and happened to meet us in the woods, soon after we entered the main road after leaving the stream leading from the water station. Her calling him, he said, had caused him to appear to her, but he afterwards thought she might have called any one in the same way; he was ashamed of it, but he had thought of it.

He was quite a grotesque object as he sat in his chair, wrapped in a quilt, and with wet cloths piled on his feverish head, and when I offered him his medicine he refused to take it, saying that it did him no good; his trouble, he said, could not be reached by medicine; what he needed was sleep and rest, and that he could not get; that was leading him up to a spell of sickness, he feared, and

if Mrs. Barnaby heard of it, she would come to see him. She knew where he was, and if she heard he was very sick she would certainly come to see him; and that would settle it. She would make him worse, and kill him. By her presence she would gloat over his humiliation, and he could not stand that; he must get sleep; he must have something to make him sleep.

"Give me that bottle," he said, turning around, and pointing to a stand which stood in the room. "I'll try that."

I handed it to him, and he drank half the strong brandy it contained at one draught. Soon after he staggered over to the bed, and laid down, and although he fell asleep I do not think it rested him much, for he tossed about, and occasionally sat up, and glared wildly around, as though he had been dreaming of unpleasant things. Lying down again, he would say he was tired, and must sleep. Once he cried out, as I have heard children cry out in alarm, in the night, and when he

sprang up he asked roughly what I was doing there; but when he recognized me, he laid down again. He was so much worse that I should have sent for the doctor had I not known that he was due in a little while, for daybreak was close at hand, and the stars in the pathway were disappearing. I feared that Uncle Tom was seriously ill; I could not help knowing it, for I now realized that it had been coming on for months as a result of his nervous unrest, and I thought that after he had grown steadily worse, and suffered a great deal, I should stand in the gray of the morning at the window where he usually sat, and remark that the stars in the pathway had disappeared, and then turn to find Uncle Tom dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ANTE-MORTEM STATEMENT.

Uncle Tom's condition was so much worse the next day that I arranged to remain with him constantly, and though the clerks from the store occasionally called in the evening to see him, they did not remain long, and I had almost the entire care, with the assistance of the negro Archie, who was very faithful and useful, except for his grumbling because of Uncle Tom's failure to take the magic bitters he had prepared some time before.

The doctor we had called was evidently puzzled by the case, and while he was studying it he acted as though he thought that nothing serious was the matter, but when he finally confessed to me that Uncle Tom was suffering from a low fever, and I told him of

his restlessness and sleeplessness, he seemed to understand it better.

In watching with him at night, when he was quiet I occasionally went to sleep, but on awakening I always found him wide-awake; sometimes sitting in the chair in front of the window looking toward Fog Lake, and wrapped in the bed-clothing; at other times I found him unsteadily walking the floor; but he was always awake except when under the influence of opiates, and I often thought that he was quiet at times to permit me to go off to sleep. He often said that he would soon be well again if he could sleep as easily as I did, and, on realizing that his great need was rest, he took doses of the opiates the doctor had left, in spite of my advice to the contrary, for I thought they did him more harm than good; he always seemed worse after taking them, and tossed about and muttered more than ever.

At these times he was always reviewing his case with Mrs. Barnaby; he was anxious to make her understand that he had not tried to

wrong her, and that he wanted to do that which was best for both of them. I thought he dreaded her hatred, and his explanations were at times pitiful; he dreaded the thought that he was dying, and could not convince the world that he had never deserved the horrible opinions she had so often expressed of him, and begged that she would be as fair with him as he had been with her. He had made mistakes; but could she not see that she should share the blame? This was often expressed, though in different ways; he acknowledged his wrong, but would she insist to the edge of his grave that he was always wrong, and that she was always right? Would she not acknowledge, to comfort his few friends, that there was at least the excuse of long vexation for his acts? He asked this as though he was her prisoner, and as though she was looking at him fiercely, with instruments of torture ready to her hand; he was willing to die the death she willed, but pitifully asked that she acknowledge her share in the evil that had found its way into

their lives. All this was muttered at intervals, and with long pauses between the sentences; but I understood it, and felt that while Uncle Tom was willing to acknowledge his own faults, he would never believe that he was to blame for more than half of that part of his life that was shameful; had his idol not left the sanctuary to wander about calling pitifully for help, to indicate that there was rain, and cold, and sorrow, in his heaven, I thought his confession to it would have been: I acknowledge my fault; now let Mrs. Barnaby acknowledge hers.

With the approach of day he would rest better, and occasionally sleep quietly; but after each tedious day his restlessness increased with the going down of the sun, and I believed that should he die it would be while under the depressing influence of night; that his strength would gradually leave him, by reason of his bad nights, and finally he could no longer hold out for the coming of the morning, and that when the sun looked into his room it would

find him quiet at last, and that the coming of night would not again disturb him.

One night he called for writing materials, and wrote a long time while propped up in bed, though slowly and with unsteady hand, for he was rapidly losing his strength. When the envelope was directed, I found it was for Mrs. Barnaby, but Uncle Tom told me it was not to be delivered until he was dead; he left the letter with me, and trusted to me to carry out his instructions. I read the letter, and will submit it to the reader. It began and ended as abruptly as I give it here, and contained no signature: —

"I believe I am fatally ill, and I write this on what I regard as my death-bed; if I am called upon for an excuse of my conduct toward you hereafter, this will represent me. Our life together was a sickening failure, but I have been no more to blame than you have been. I acknowledge before all men, as I shall acknowledge before my Creator, that my conduct toward you was often wrong, and

often monstrous in its wicked stubbornness, but I declare now as my last declaration that I could not help it; your half of the blame was conducted in a manner so distasteful to me that I could not help acting as I did. When I asked for bread, you gave me worse than a stone, — a blow, and so cunningly directed that it reached my tenderest part. In the management of your half of the blame you caused me to dread your presence so much that my dread of death is not equal to it. Much as I have reason to tremble when I think of it, I shall enter the presence of my final Judge with less dread than I could enter a room in which you were, although I have lived and will die by the belief that you have no more to complain of than I have.

"I have rooted out all the hatred there is in my heart except that my last thought will be that, while you were as much to blame as I was, you demanded credit when you should have asked forgiveness of God. I am dying,

but in acknowledging my own faults I cannot forget yours, which have caused me so much trouble. I ask forgiveness of God and man for my many faults, but at your death you will call upon God and man to witness the death of a perfect woman. I forgive you for everything else; you will die as you have lived, believing that you were perfect, and that I am possessed of the faults that will be charged against us both."

He also told me about his business: how it could be best closed up, and the proceeds given to Mrs. Tom. He had intended to write to Mrs. Tom, too, he said, but he did not have the strength. I might carry his message to her; he loved her, though he did not know why. She had failed him at a time when he only asked the confidence he honestly deserved, but he loved her in spite of it; he had tried to forget her as hard as he had tried to sleep during his illness, but he could not do either, and was in a wretched situation. He had brought sorrow into three lives: Mrs. Barnaby's,

Mrs. Tom's, and his own, and was paying the penalty.

I think he made up his mind that night that he was fatally ill, and although I was so certain that he would not live through the night that I sent for Hickey, to watch with me, he was better again toward morning, as though it had been determined by the Fates that he should pay more dearly for the wrongs he had inflicted upon others.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BREAK OF DAY.

Uncle Tom had been sick two weeks, and steadily growing worse, before I made up my mind to send for Mrs. Tom; I felt that something must be done, and I could think of nothing else. During all of his sickness he had constantly complained of his need of rest, and for three days had been delirious. I remembered how often he had said that Mrs. Tom rested him when he was tired; he had said that she changed the air in Fog Lake when she visited it, and I hoped it was for the best; I could think of nothing else.

During his delirium he was constantly demanding that some one of whom he was afraid be kept out of his room; an unusual noise below would cause him to sit up in bed, and

ask that the door be locked; and while I thought he referred to Mrs. Barnaby, it sometimes occurred to me that he wanted them both to keep away; that he had made up his mind to die by his stubbornness, and get rid of the weary task of living. Therefore I was not sure that what I had done was right, and during the night when I believed Mrs. Tom was travelling toward us, and when Uncle Tom seemed much worse, I watched the pathway of stars, and it seemed to me that there was a friendly glow all the way from Fog Lake to a place directly over the window where I stood, as though the stars were glad Mrs. Tom was coming, and were lighting her on the way.

Providing she was a passenger on the train I expected, Mrs. Tom would arrive a little before three o'clock in the morning, and at times I feared Uncle Tom would never live to see her. His breathing was quick, and the old restlessness had become painful to see. In tossing about he muttered of everything that had ever concerned him, and when I

went to him his wasted appearance frightened me. He was constantly demanding that the door be locked; I thought of the door to his heart, which he had locked with bolts and bars, and I wondered whether it could ever be opened again. I had sent for the one person in the world who held the key, and hoped she could open the door so easily that Uncle Tom would be benefited by the change.

Frequently he mentioned the failure his life had been, and laughed in delirious glee, as though his object had been to make it a failure. He mentioned that he had no friends, and that amused him; and altogether his talk was so wild that I partook of his nervousness, and walked up and down the room in strange excitement. It seemed a premonition to me that I would receive a letter from Mrs. Tom saying she would not come, and in that event I could expect nothing but the worst; the awful time when Uncle Tom would rest.

The town was situated on a prairie river, and the railroad followed its valley. Ten

minutes before the train was due, I could see its approaching light, and I thought with pleasure that it seemed in a tremendous hurry; that the engine was running at a great speed, and that it partook of my own impatience; this made me hope that Mrs. Tom was a passenger on the train, and that her coming would relieve me of worry and fear.

Occasionally the light disappeared behind a hill, and when I saw it again, its haste seemed to be increased, as though it had lost the road, and was hurrying to make up for lost time. There was a long stretch of straight road near the town, and when the light appeared upon this, the rapid manner in which it approached made me feel like cheering; the light had caught sight of the town in which Uncle Tom lived; perhaps it could see the very house in which he lay dying, and it seemed to be racing with death to get there first.

When the train passed, on its way to the station at the upper end of the town, I thought I had never seen it run so rapidly, and I was

sure then that Mrs. Tom was a passenger; the gentle Mrs. Tom had not lost a moment, for she must have taken the train within an hour after receiving the message; like the good angel that she was, she had lost no time.

Old Archie was at the station with his lantern to meet her, and soon I heard them hurrying along, and I could detect a woman's voice making anxious inquiries; I think I never fully appreciated her goodness until I realized how promptly she had answered my summons, in spite of the neglect to which she had been subjected; but the magic music of her voice was on the street, and would soon be in the room. In thinking of what effect it would have, I turned toward the bed, and found that the sufferer was quiet, as though he already felt the effect of Mrs. Tom's presence in the town.

When she came into the room, after a short pause downstairs to collect herself, she was very calm, I thought, and walked directly over to the bed, and it so happened that Uncle Tom turned his back to her, but he

was delirious, and did not know what he was doing; I am sure of that, but for a moment Mrs. Tom did not understand, and seemed greatly hurt. She cried a little as she stood smoothing his forehead, but soon passed into another room to remove her wraps.

She had not spoken to me, but I did not care for that, I was so anxious for her coming to prove a blessing.

Almost instantly Uncle Tom came to himself, and looked at me with a vacant stare, which soon became intelligent.

"Chance," he said, "you don't know how much better I feel. Has anything happened?"

His wife was standing within a few feet of him, listening, but I dared not confess yet, so I answered, "No; nothing has happened."

"If I did not know differently I should say that Mrs. Tom was in the house. There is an air around here that I used to notice when I visited at your house in Fog Lake. That must have been mighty good medicine the doctor left last to have that effect. I believe I'm better."

He talked a little while in this strain, and then went to sleep again, when Mrs. Tom softly returned to his side. She seemed to remember how well he used to rest with his head in her lap, and raised his head and his pillow until she held him in the old position, which Uncle Tom always regarded as the height of luxury. He seemed to relish the change, even in his sleep, and looked as contented as he ever did at home, except that his lips were parched and feverish.

Mrs. Tom occasionally moistened his lips and softly stroked his hair and forehead, and this seemed so grateful to him that he slept soundly; it was a refreshing sleep, this time, I was sure. I believed that when he came out of his peaceful, quiet sleep, he would be on the road to recovery, and this was so consoling that I dozed off myself, but when I awoke Mrs. Tom was still softly stroking his hair, and when she thought I was asleep I saw her raise his pale hand to her lips; I did not doubt now that he would be glad

I had sent for his wife; the influence she had exerted over him already convinced me of this, and I regretted I had not sent sooner.

I went to sleep again in my chair, and was aroused, I don't know how long afterwards, by a motion on the part of Uncle Tom. I was so close to the bed that I could touch him, and I saw that when he opened his eyes he looked squarely into his wife's face, and that he did not take his eyes from hers.

"Is it you, Mrs. Tom?" he asked, with a slight tremor and huskiness in his voice.

"Yes, dear Tom," she replied, in her sweet voice, which thrilled me; I don't know how it affected him.

He looked at the footboard of the bed for a while, and then clasped his hands back of his head, as I had seen him do so often at home when he was thoroughly comfortable; while he was thinking, I noticed that his lips trembled, which caused him to say: —

"I wish you would lay your handkerchief over my face for a moment."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

Mrs. Tom did as he requested, and I think we both joined him in his weakness, for I remember finding my handkerchief with difficulty, and that I wiped tears from Mrs. Tom's face.

Uncle Tom removed the handkerchief himself presently and again looked at his wife.

"Have you been divorced from me?" he asked, in such a weak and troubled voice that I could not easily connect it with the strong man I had known in Fog Lake. It caused me to realize how very ill he had been, for the frenzy of despair had left him now, and he was very weak.

"No, Tom; I love you more now than I ever did, and have been thinking every hour of coming to you. I will kiss you if you want me to."

"Well, I want you to, if Chance don't mind it in his presence."

I didn't care for that, but I felt that I wanted to go out of the room for a while, and when I returned I did not believe they had moved or spoken. Uncle Tom had been looking at the footboard of the bed through a mist, I think, but he must have felt better, for Mrs. Tom's hand was on his forehead, and he was always talking of the magic of her touch.

"Your coming back to me," he said to his wife, when I came in, as though he had been waiting for me to hear him say it, "has saved my life, I think, and it is the greatest event in my life, except meeting you in the first place; but I don't believe I should have asked you, though I have felt all the time that I should die if you didn't come. I never intend to be stubborn again; it hurts me more than anything I ever tried. I am a very stubborn man, and intended when I sent you away to forget you, or live a life of misery, and while

I couldn't forget you, I succeeded in the other; no one can ever know how well I did that. I know now how men go mad; I have been so near it that I am frightened. A man's stubbornness becomes madness, and he does not know it, and finally he destroys himself, believing that he is in his right mind."

Uncle Tom was quite exhausted by this time, and while he was resting he looked slyly at his wife, and then turned his eyes quickly, as though to look at her humiliated him.

"You did everything you could do," he said, after a while, "but somehow in my frenzy I imagined I was dying, and that when I was painfully gasping for breath you thought I was doing it simply to distress you. A man should submit to anything rather than submit to the horrors of stubbornness. I was in the wrong, but I believe I suffered as much as you did, who were in the right. Do you think any less of me because of my stubbornness?"

"No, Tom; you are too weak to talk, or I

should tell you how much more I think of you than I ever did. Can't you go to sleep again?"

"No; you'll have to excuse me for refusing to sleep when you talk that way to me. Your voice is as pleasant as ever; how I have longed to hear it! I was mistaken about the possibility of ever tiring of you, but I wonder you have not tired of me. You used to say that I was good to you, and I enjoyed your saying it as much as though I really was, but I can honestly say that you have been wonderfully patient with me; had you not been, we should have ended our lives in the greatest wretchedness."

I left them soon after, and went to bed, and had lost so much sleep of late that I did not see them again until the afternoon, when I found Uncle Tom propped up in bed trying a bowl of broth which Mrs. Tom had just brought up, though he was yet so weak that he made poor progress with it. Uncle Tom's pale face was radiant with happiness,

and, as he shook hands with me, when I came in, I imagined that he had learned that I had had something to do with it.

Mrs. Tom was afraid he would over-exert himself, but her husband said no; now that she had come back, he could get up and dress, and walk down town if he wanted to, and fight the blacksmith.

Mrs. Tom hovered about him night and day, and I wondered when she rested herself; but in spite of it she was as happy as she could be, for Uncle Tom had been restored to her.

I returned to my neglected work soon after her arrival, and was quite busy; but whenever I went into their room I found them as happy as they had ever been, and Uncle Tom talked no more of the time when he would tire of his wife.

One day, while he was still in bed, but recovering his strength as rapidly as possible, I came across a wagon going toward our house in which was loaded Mrs. Tom's trunk

and effects. The different articles seemed like a load of old friends from Fog Lake, and I followed reverently behind; I thought it the greatest procession in my life, for I knew that Mrs. Tom had come to stay, and that our troubles were over; I knew that Uncle Tom had sent for the trunk and the other modest effects, and that everything he had lost had been restored to him.

Occasionally, when I was alone with him, and Mrs. Tom was out of the room for a moment, a strange look came into Uncle Tom's eyes, and I thought he was thinking of his humiliation in the presence of Mrs. Barnaby. Once Mrs. Tom came into the room while I was there, and the strangeness of his look frightened her, for she ran to him, and said he must be thinking ill of her. But he soon laughed, and nodded and shook his head, to declare that he would always love her, and that he would never forget her; but after that I somehow believed that he occasionally thought of the darkest night

of his life, in spite of the bright light then shining into it.

When he lived with Mrs. Tom at Fog Lake, no recollection of Mrs. Barnaby ever made him thoughtful, he was so content with his new home; and though I feared for a while that this thinking might grow upon him, it never did, except that he once fished Margaret out of the dusty place to which she had retreated, and said that his indifference to her neglect was because he had never been able to love her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A RIVAL.

THE invalid's improvement was marvellously rapid; when I went into his room during the days immediately following Mrs. Tom's arrival, I usually found him fast asleep, or having a merry time with his wife, for she was always with him. In a week he sat up, and walked about the house a little, and soon after ventured to look in at the store, Mrs. Tom accompanying him. Great numbers of the people congratulated him on his return to health, and he introduced them to his wife, with every evidence of pride and pleasure.

In a month he was looking better than he ever did, and professed to be the happiest man alive. In two months fine-looking people began arriving from the city to see him; gentlemen who had been his business associates,

accompanied by their wives in most cases, and the excursions they made, headed by Uncle Tom and his wife, were the wonder of the town.

The town seemed to share in Uncle Tom's good fortune, for it prospered, and it was not long before Uncle Tom sold his store and opened a bank, in which I think some of his friends from the City were interested. In the course of time my name appeared on the printed stationery as one of the officers; when my mother came to see us, she said she always knew I would become a banker, but she never knew how skilfully and patiently Uncle Tom taught me the little I knew, or how his friendly interest encouraged me to do my best.

There was great excitement at our house one day, and, after an absence of several hours, Uncle Tom came into the room where I was at work, and said he had a Rival; a roaring boy, who looked like his father, it turned out to be, and although he was named Rival, he did not deserve it, for a few months later, during one of Mrs. Tom's visits

to her husband in his office, I heard him say that really Rival ought to have more attention; although Uncle Tom appreciated the manner in which his wife was always "tagging" after him, he feared that Rival was being neglected, and that the neighbors would talk about it. And Mrs. Tom would say that while she loved this precious baby, she loved Uncle Tom a thousand times more, and then they would both forget Rival in thinking of each other.

But Rival was not neglected. He was immensely popular with old Archie and with me, and when Number Two arrived, and arranged his canteens and knapsacks in the room we had assigned him, Rival had all the attention he needed. Before he was two years old the boy loved to spend his time in the room where the muskets, and swords, and brass buttons were kept; where he drank from a canteen, and where all the things he admired were packed away in knapsacks. Later in life he was gone for half days at a time with Number Two, sleeping peacefully

on a blue coat while his venerable friend watched his bob and bait in the river. Such an attachment sprang up between them, indeed, that the father and mother were at times a little piqued because of his carelessness toward them, but they cheerfully said that they had begun it, and forgave him.

There were many old soldiers in that part of the country, and although Number Two frequently put on his blue uniform, and went away to reunions, there were no Copperheads present to annoy him, and he came back in the best condition. But we all imagined that if Number One should come to see us, The Bends would break out again, so Number One never came.

From the Boomer, who visited Hooper, and looked admiringly at the boom, and the neighboring prairie that might be converted into additions, we learned that Number One was still looking highly respectable, and that he read a great many books, but the Boomer believed that he often regretted his determination to never again speak the name of Thos. Saulsbury.

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO LETTERS.

DURING Uncle Tom's illness there came to his address a letter from Mrs. Barnaby, but as it was marked personal, he did not see it until after he was able to read it to Mrs. Tom and me. I take the liberty of introducing it, in taking farewell of the reader, together with the reply: —

"I hear that you are ill, and write this in the hope that you will not die hating me as you do; I fear that you will not recover from your hatred in the passage through the grave, and that you will be restless in heaven because I hope to go there.

"I acknowledge now what I have never been able to acknowledge before, that in our joint affairs I was often wrong. Now that I know my own capacity for love, I realize

that much of the wrong I did you was because of the lack of it; I realize that much of the wrong you did me was due to the lack of a love that was necessary to your life. When I found that you possessed what I lacked, in the love of Mrs. Tom, I did what I would not do again: I used the power I possessed to drive you from it. I acknowledge my fault, and am sincere. In my dreariness and loneliness I did many things I should not have done; I say from my heart that I believe that your dreariness and loneliness are responsible for much that you did that we are both ashamed of.

"I am now the wife of Mr. Barnaby, who was so long your confidential clerk; I hope you will be glad to know that I am content, and that he has found that in me which I always thought was admirable, but which you incensed me by denying, by your conduct, existed at all. I know now what hard blows I gave you; I did not know when they were given. I realize now, as I never realized

before, that my womanly dignity and pride would not supply the vacant place in your heart.

"Mr. Barnaby has known you nearly all your business life; I hope it will please you to know that he speaks of you only in praise. He believes you to be a fair and honorable man; and I think so, too. I once believed differently, but I think so now. My relations with him began while he was your trusted agent; he respected me then, and wondered why you dreaded me so much, but at that time, as now, he deserved the confidence you reposed in him. Since he has become my husband I have joined him in saying that you were no more to blame than I was. I could not say more; I sincerely hope you will accept it in the spirit which prompts it: a spirit of regret that we were mutually so unhappy; a spirit of forgiveness, as I hope to be forgiven.

"I am sorry that while I am contented, for the first time in my life, you are more wretched

than you ever were before; I hope your experience in the past will teach you that you should not be as stubborn with Mrs. Tom as you were with me. Stubbornness is your greatest sin; you should overcome it as I overcame my pride, and humbled myself by confessing what I once thought would never pass my lips. I believe in Mrs. Tom because you love her; she is the woman I was not, and could not be. You were always consistent in your dread of me; you have been consistent in everything, except in your stubbornness with her."

Uncle Tom's reply was written in the same strange way, without address or signature, on the day that he received Mrs. Barnaby's letter:

"I forgive everything; I forget everything, except that we have wasted so many years. This I can never forget, though I shall never think of it unkindly, but with regret; it will often occur to me, in spite of myself, that I might have been a better man now had I been wiser in my youth. An unhappy fate has

willed that the son never heeds the lessons of the father; the wisdom of the father is dismissed by the untried son as the croaking of an old man in his dotage, and so it comes about that we all fall into the same pitfalls, and learn by bitter experience that which has been learned so often before. I shall only think of our past with the same sorrow that possesses me when I remember that I did not heed the teachings of my elders when a boy.

"That you were a good woman I never doubted, as I never doubted that I was an honest man, though wronging you every day. There is no right; the best we can do is the only right, and we did the best we could while wronging each other. We were both right, for we did the best we could, yet we were both wrong. We knew years ago that we could not live together; in this we were right, but we kept up the struggle, and in this we were wrong. Marry the bull to a scarlet flag, and the gods would watch the conflict with pity.

"Of my old stubbornness I have none left, for Mrs. Tom is with me. She is beside me as I write this, and in her presence I can only think of the old hate to regret it. Honor seems more precious to me now than it ever did before, though I have always tried to deserve the respect of men; but since you have agreed to blot out the past, receive my assurance that I shall be very careful of the future. For every sorrow I have caused I shall endeavor to provide a double measure of joy; for every wrong in my past I shall endeavor to supply a double measure of good in the future, to the end that I may hear hereafter, as I have heard this day, that there is forgiveness, and peace, and good will."

THE END.

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